



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

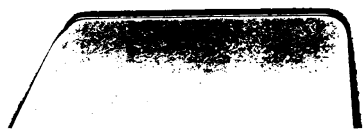
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07572358 9



NEW
ROSE

THE
LANCE OF COMFORT;

OR THE
2d Maid and Married Woman.

A Novel.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

By **MRS. BOSS,**
R OF THE MARCHIONESS, THE COUSINS, FAMILY ESTATE,
MODERN CALYPSO, PAIRED—NOT MATCHED, &c.

Alas! and is domestic strife,
That sorest ill of human life,
A plague so little to be fear'd
As to be wantonly incur'd,
To gratify a fretful passion,
On every trivial provocation
The kindest and the happiest pair
Will find occasion to forbear;
And something, every day they live,
To pity, and perhaps forgive. COWPER.

.....
Qui capit ille facit.

SECOND EDITION.

VOL. III.

London:

Printed at the Minerva Press for
NEWMAN AND CO. LEADENHALL-STREET.

1817.

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY

286367B

ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

1944

L

THE
BALANCE OF COMFORT.

CHAPTER I.

If she do frown, 'tis not in hate of you.

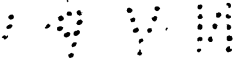
SHAKESPEARE.

THE continual employment of reading old letters, documents, and papers of various sorts, and attending her counsel, completely took up Mrs. Charlton's time, and prevented her shewing to Althea the numerous beauties of Ireland herself, as she wished to have done. She therefore took some pains to select for her a pleasant circle, with whom she might visit in Dublin, or accompany to different places.

Althea, who went merely as her companion, and was never without resources in her own mind, wished to decline many of

the invitations which Irish hospitality pressed her to accept, and which she did accept rather to gratify Mrs. Charlton than herself.

The house of Mr. and Mrs. Fitzpatrick was the one she most liked to visit, for in the manners and character of its mistress, she traced a great similarity to her sister Isabella, and found in her family less continual change and bustle, with equal hospitality and friendliness, than in any other she frequented. She was equally a favourite with them, and sometimes accompanied them for a few days to a lovely retreat, about twelve miles from Dublin, called Belfont. She had very often wondered that in all her different visits to different families, and the public amusements, she had never yet even heard the names of sir Montague Vavasour or Miss Orford, if indeed she had not exchanged that name for her cousin's, and she had ventured sometimes to remark this to Mrs. Charlton; but that lady's raillery generally silenced her, and prevented her mentioning his name



to any one else. She wished, nevertheless, to know where they both were, and whether they were married, and fortune at length favoured her wishes.

"Now, Althea," said Mrs. Fitzpatrick, as they drove gaily towards Belfont, "take care of your heart; for at sir Moreton Boyle's this evening you will probably see our Irish boast, sir Montague Vavasour; but as he is already monopolized, you may as well be cautioned against his numerous fascinations."

"I think, my dear, Miss Vernon seems pretty well fortified by her own invincible coldness," replied Mr. Fitzpatrick; "and indeed, after seeing so many handsome men as I have introduced to her, and hearing all their vows of love with indifference, I cannot think it likely that Vavasour's plain face will do much execution."

"Plain face!" exclaimed his wife. "What, with those eyes and teeth, and that polished forehead? Then what a figure!—what an address! He is too grave,

perhaps, but I always impute that to Constantia. What envious mortals you men are ! you never can bear to give each other due praise, personal praise at least."

"Nay, faith !" said Mr. Fitzpatrick, pulling up his cravat, and good-humouredly turning aside his waving hair from one of the handsomest faces in Ireland.

"Yes, yes, I allow *you* are exempted from the charge of *envy*, however that of *vanity* may attach to you," returned his wife with an admiring smile. "But Althea shall tell me at night what she thinks of the baronet's beauty, and I would bet a trifle she thinks him handsomer than you, because he has more sentiment in his features."

"Well, perhaps she may. I always thought some of Miss Vernon's opinions rather singular."

This playful dialogue diverted Althea's confusion, which the mention of sir Montague's name had caused, and their attention from observing it ; but still she could not discover from any thing that had been

said, whether he was still single, and only the lover of Miss Orford. Desirous of concealing her former acquaintance with him, she asked no questions either respecting himself or Miss Orford, but determined to await quietly the meeting of the evening, and the information that meeting would afford. Had any one told her that she took more than common care in decorating her person, she would have denied it altogether; but certainly her beautiful hair was more elegantly disposed, and the most becoming dress was selected, and never had Althea looked so well.

A party like the one held this evening at Kilmoreton Park generally included a dance, and Althea expected to become the baronet's partner for two dances, which she reckoned of, because it would give her an opportunity of talking of their English friends—for no other reason, of course. Althea was, as usual, soon surrounded by young friends of both sexes; for though much courted by the beaux, she carried so little the appearance of triumphing over

her less-admired neighbours, and possessed so little the spirit of coquetry, or even flirtation, that she was a great favourite with the belles. Her hand was engaged, to her great mortification, for more dances than would be exhibited that night, and no sir Montague had yet appeared in the party; but she could not refuse to dance on that account, though she engaged herself unwillingly.

The name of Orford at length reached her ears, and breaking from the group with whom she was talking, she stepped forward to see the person who bore it, and who would be, she concluded, accompanied by Vavasour. She saw no stranger lady, nor did she see sir Montague—she beheld only a vulgar-looking, ill-made, red-faced man, who slouched up the room towards the party she was standing amongst, and who slightly saluted him by the name of Orford. She then recognised the hateful Patrick Orford, who was so nearly connected with the fate of Constantia, and no longer wondered at her abhorrence of him.

She remembered that it was to save her from this detested cousin, that Vavasour fulfilled an engagement which his heart refused to ratify, and she again longed to see the lady, to judge still more accurately of the sacrifice he made to generosity.

Half the evening, however, passed away, and Fitzpatrick, whose attention had been arrested by the involuntary eagerness with which Althea's eyes watched the door, had more than once asked her if she expected any one? She blushed consciously as she affected to laugh at the idea; and as she was endeavouring to enter into a gay conversation with him, she saw a lady enter, whom she seemed to know, by intuition, was her for whom she watched. She had expected to see a plain woman, and one not very young; but the first glance absolutely shocked her, and she felt inexpressibly relieved, for Vavasour's sake, when she heard Fitzpatrick address the object before her as still *Miss Orford*. She was remarkably small, and either was deformed, or carried herself so ill as to ap-

pear so ; whilst her face, deeply seamed with the ravages of the small-pox, owed its not being absolutely hideous to a pair of the most beautifully bright dark eyes ever beheld. Every other feature was ugly, thin, dark, and meagre, and her age apparently more than it really was. She was soon surrounded, and Althea thought, seemed lively and pleasant, whilst the animation of those brilliant eyes almost atoned for the excessive ugliness of the rest of her face. She could not withdraw her attention, and sedulously listened to catch the tone of her voice, and learn where sir Montague was, and whether he was expected there that evening. At length she heard Miss Orford say, in a sweet tone, as if replying to some question—"No, he will not be here to-night, nor for a great many more to-nights, I'm afraid. He is gone to England, to Charleville."

Althea felt herself colour extremely, as she heard this disappointment of her expectations, for she hardly knew whether she most wished or feared his coming.

She observed that Miss Orford hardly deigned to return her cousin Patrick's bow, and that he did not attempt to approach to any thing more like acquaintance between them. The pleasure of the evening, though she knew not why, was lost to Althea; for the only interest she now took was in watching Miss Orford, and trying to discover if her mind was more beautiful than her face. She was soon convinced she was lively, clever, and very satirical; and that though the gentlemen seemed somewhat afraid of her, she was yet a favourite with almost all. At length she lost her in a crowd of people pushing to the supper-room; and as she was very short, Althea did not find her out again till she heard her well-known voice say—"Vernon! What, Althea Vernon? Are you sure it is Althea? Do tell me what sort of a girl she is. Is she handsome? is she clever? is she pleasant? shall I like her? You know not how much I am interested in this girl, nor how

10 THE BALANCE OF COMFORT.

zealously I have sought to meet her. Come, introduce me. Yet—no, not yet; first point her out to me.”

“Shall I answer your numerous queries first? or are you indifferent as to the answers?” replied Mr. Boyle, laughing at her eagerness.

Althea was glad that the crowd dispersing allowed her to move forward with Mr. Dorrington, and escape the hearing her own praises, now lavishly sounded by Mr. Boyle. She heard Miss Orford laugh heartily, as she accused him of always painting in such glowing colours.

“They are too vivid to be lasting, my good friend,” said she; “milder and mellow tints would suit my optics better, and promise more durability.”

Althea endeavoured to get at the extreme end of the table from that occupied by Miss Orford; but she saw from that distance, that Boyle had pointed her out to observation, and she felt confused and uneasy under the piercing and critical survey Miss Orford’s eyes proclaimed.

she was taking. She expected nothing but that an introduction would take place after supper; but she was surprised, and rather piqued, that no such thing seemed to be intended by Miss Orford. She still fixed upon her her unvarying observation, though Althea's changing countenance must have convinced her she was annoyed by such conduct: but the evening closed, and Althea returned to Belfont without having spoken to Miss Orford. The conversation during their drive home turned on this lady, and on the disappointment every one seemed to have experienced in not seeing sir Montague.

"Did you ever see such a plain little creature?" said Mrs. Fitzpatrick. "If you knew Vavasour, you would be as sorry as we are to think of his uniting himself to such a queer woman. She is very good, and very sensible, and very rich, certainly—that I cannot deny; but still she is not a proper wife for sir Montague Vavasour. 'Tis evident enough that he does not, cannot love her, by their

not marrying, and I think she ought to imitate his generosity, and give him up. She knows it is only to preserve her from being obliged to give her hand to that odious Patrick Orford, that he has not long ago dissolved the connexion; and as she would forfeit only money, of which she must, even then, have more than enough, I must think she is very deficient in real goodness or greatness of heart."

"She is perhaps very much attached to him, and finds the task too difficult of giving him up for ever," said Althea, who found she must speak.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Fitzpatrick, "I dare say she is fond enough of him, and no wonder; but what does that signify, if he does not like her well enough to marry her? Well, she is coming to Belfont in a day or two, to stay some time; and then you and I, Althea, will try and make out something. By-the-bye, she was very inquisitive to know who you were — *what* Miss Vernon, and from whence; yet when Boyle offered to in-

troduce you, she refused. What could she mean, I wonder?—Fitz, do you understand it? Lord! I declare this wretch is asleep, and you, Althea, might as well be in a nap too. Are you dreaming of Boyle or Dorrington, my dear?”

“Of neither, I do assure you,” replied Althea; “my thoughts had just taken a flight to England.”

“To the vicarage, no doubt. You shall have a country parson, I’m determined,” said Mrs. Fitzpatrick.

Althea’s thoughts for once were in England, and *not at the parsonage*; but she did not choose to contradict the idea, and was glad when she found herself alone, and at liberty to think.

CHAPTER II.

If I live to be as old as Sibylla, I will die as chaste as Diana,
unless I be obtained by the manner of my father's will.

SHAKESPEARE.

A FEW days after this first meeting with Miss Orford brought her to Belfont as a visitor of some continuance—a circumstance at which Althea hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry. She had owed to Mrs. Fitzpatrick her former acquaintance with sir Montague Vavasour, certain that it would transpire through Miss Orford, and aware of the strange appearance it would have to make a mystery of so immaterial a thing.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick drew her own conclusions of Althea's sentiments; but as Montague was considered as an excellent man, she felt it would not do to show on a preference she wished to conceal.

The introduction of Althea and Miss Orford to each other was received by each with a silent, and rather cold courtesy, and little mutual communication took place for that day. Each seemed to be silently examining the other, and undetermined what judgment to form, where there was very evidently a prejudice in either mind. Miss Orford's piercing eyes were generally intently fixed on Althea's face, so much so as to render her really uncomfortable; whilst, if she spoke to any person, Miss Orford would instantly suspend her own conversation, and listen attentively. Althea did not like this at all, and requested Mrs. Fitzpatrick to convey her to Mrs. Charlton, from whom she had now been some days absent, candidly acknowledging, at the same time, that Miss Orford's unpleasant and almost-rude scrutiny occasioned her wish of leaving Belfont.

Mrs. Fitzpatrick promised, if the cause of the quarrel continued, that she would take Althea to Mrs. Charlton, determined in her own opinion to mention Althea's sentiments to

Miss Orford, and ask the reason for such intent observation.

"Has it then been so very obvious?" returned Miss Orford to Mrs. Fitzpatrick's laughing remark, and account of Althea's discomposure. "Poor child! I was not aware I distressed her so cruelly. I must be more guarded in my study of her character and manners; but I must continue to observe her very strictly, for I have very particular reasons for so doing, though what they are, neither she or you will learn at present."

"You are very enigmatical, but I know you too well to expect any solution till your own time," answered Mrs. Fitzpatrick. "But how do you like my young friend?"

"I have not studied her long enough to determine," Miss Orford replied bluntly. "I have heard much in her praise, but I think very little of that. Pray do you know how she likes me? or, rather, what she thinks of me? Does she not wonder that sir Montague Vavasour should think

for a moment of making such a fright his wife?"

"Miss Vernon is not apt to draw hasty conclusions, nor to place all good in a face or form," said Mrs. Fitzpatrick. "She is very able to judge of characters, and, I dare say, gives sir Montague credit for having discovered the excellence of yours. However, I never heard her mention your engagements with him, nor indeed ever heard her speak of him at all, till the day after she had seen you at Kilmoreton; I did not even know she was acquainted with him till then. She is not pleased with your too-evident attention to herself, for she thinks it proceeds from dislike, or something in her manners or appearance that disgusts you, particularly as, *personally*, you are rather cold and uncivil than conciliating to her."

Miss Orford laughed—"I shall find means to change her opinion of me," said she, "and convince her she is mistaken, if she thinks I do not like her; but I have much at stake, in which she is intimately

18. THE BALANCE OF COMFORT.

concerned, and I dare not decide hastily. To be sure, I might study her politely, as well as not; and so I'll soften my regards a little, and be more civil in my scrutiny, at any rate."

"When do you expect Vavasour in Ireland again?"

"Whenever I please to recall him," said Miss Orford.

"Have you banished him then?"

"Not altogether — partly my doing, partly another's. I shall not tell you my secret, Mrs. Fitz; so you need not ask any more questions, either openly or insidiously. Come, let us seek Miss Vernon; I want to talk to her."

From this time Miss Orford treated Althea with marked attention and kindness; and though she continued to observe every word and action with a degree of interest unaccountable to every one, she did it inoffensively; and Althea having nothing to conceal, and no longer fearing Miss Orford, rose daily in her good opinion, and soon felt, on her part, perfectly at ease, and a

great regard for her friendly inquisitor.

Why she should be such an object of interest and close observation, however, she could not comprehend ; and when she asked the reason of Miss Orford herself, she laughed, but referred her to time for an explanation.

Various parties at various places occupied Althea's time for several succeeding weeks, with occasional visits to Mrs. Charlton, who was however too much engaged in business to wish her to remain long together at Dublin, particularly as the country was so much pleasanter, and so much more agreeable to her habits and temper. In this Mrs. Charlton sacrificed her own comforts and wishes, which would have led her always to retain Althea with her ; but she and Miss Orford understood each other, and the hope of eventually benefiting her favourite, effectually checked every idea of self, and induced her to urge Althea's continuance at Belfont or Kilmoreton, where Miss Orford principally divided her time, and where Althea was ever a welcome

guest. At the latter place, indeed, her presence gave at once pleasure and pain, for young Mr. Boyle had not seen Althea without passionate admiration ; and sanctioned by his parents, who, themselves abounding in wealth, cared only for character, manners, and respectability in the woman of their son's choice, had declared the preference she inspired, and offered her a heart and hand worthy of her. But Althea at once assured him his love was unreturned, and so decidedly rejected him, that he was obliged to remain contented with her friendship, which she gladly offered him. She admired, esteemed, and valued him, but she could not love ; she believed she never should ; for not to herself would she allow that she cherished any thing like that sentiment for sir Montague Vavasour. Sir Moreton and lady Boyle made one effort to change her decision ; but convinced that she did not feel the affection for their son they wished, they relinquished the hope of their hearts, and only begged to be still considered as her steady friends.

Miss Orford had appeared greatly agitated during the negotiation between the Boyles and Althea, though not a word to either party escaped her on the subject. She evidently felt very much relieved when it was finally concluded, and appeared more than ever attached to Althea, who, in every part of her conduct, on all occasions, acted with equal delicacy, sense, and firmness. She had gradually imbibed a most lively and sincere affection for her, which Althea, on her part, very cordially returned. She found Miss Orford a woman of strong sense, though singular manners, and of a most amiable disposition. There was, indeed, a certain want of openness of temper in her, which did not exactly suit one of Althea's warm feelings, and sometimes checked her when she was disposed to be unreserved; but this seemed rather forced than natural, and Althea waited patiently her own time for confidence. Miss Orford sometimes spoke of sir Montague, and her own situation as engaged to marry him, if she ever married at all; but that, she said,

was amongst the many uncertainties of this world, and that she probably should die unmarried.

"You shall admit me into your old maid's college, Althea," said she; "for I promise to be very cheerful and good-tempered, which, I think, are included in your list of qualifications."

"Oh no! with your disposition and your wealth, you will, I hope, make sir Montague Vavasour, or some other equally-amiable man, happy," replied Althea, with an involuntary sigh. "But if you are to be an old maid, I am sure *we* shall be very happy to enrol you amongst us."

"If I become one of your votaries, my dear, I shall be comparatively poor," said Miss Orford, "and I much suspect that my admission at the college will be the signal for your being declared *without the pale*. You don't understand me, I see. Never mind. I shall not always be a riddle."

"I hope not," answered Althea; "but really at present you would puzzle the Sphinx himself to expound you."

"Why would you not have Moreton Boyle?" said Miss Orford, after a pause of some minutes.

"Because I did not love him as a husband ought to be loved," Althea replied.

"Well, that's a proper reason enough. But do you love any other better?"

"No," answered Althea, with some little hesitation, and a very deep blush as she met Miss Orford's formidable eyes. "Besides," she continued, "you know I have always declared my intention of never marrying at all, and really I see nothing in any of my wedded friends to induce a change of opinion on this point."

"Well now, if I do marry Vavasour, you shall see an entirely new system. The *fitch* shall be annually hung up in our hall, and we will be the most noted couple in both kingdoms ever heard of. You shall come and view *our* happiness, and be seduced by it into a recantation of your erroneous ideas on this subject. I never knew so fine a temper as Vavasour's in my

life, and mine is not a bad one. Will you pay us a visit if we do marry?"

Althea endeavoured to laugh and enjoy the picture Miss Orford had drawn, as much as she herself appeared to do, and promised to visit the happy couple whenever invited; but her smile was not so natural and unconstrained as she intended, and again she felt uncomfortable at Miss Orford's manner, which she could not understand.

"Well, I will not perplex and tease you any longer," said Miss Orford, more seriously. "I have studied you well, my dear Althea, and I think I know your heart, its feelings, and its wishes. It may be in my power to promote your happiness, for I think I have discovered the means by which I can do so effectually. To-morrow I return to my own house, where you will, I hope, visit me, if you have an opportunity, before you leave this country; if not, I will visit you at—in England, whenever you invite me. Mrs. Charlton's business is, I know, now coming forward

for a final decision, and you must necessarily return to Dublin. I will take you there, if you please, to-morrow, as I pass through, and I wish to have a little conversation with her."

Althea readily agreed to this, and Mrs. Fitzpatrick, who knew how she was situated, could make no objection, though very unwilling to part with her. She left Belfont accordingly with Miss Orford, who, after being closeted with Mrs. Charlton for some time, came forth with her eyes red and swollen with weeping, embraced Althea with great affection, and quickly entering her chariot, drove off, and left the wondering girl lost in surprise and sorrow at such evident marks of distress in her friend. Mrs. Charlton said nothing on the subject, and Althea did not like to question her. The rest of the day was given to a final investigation of dull papers, and Althea retired to rest, fatigued, dispirited, and heartily wishing herself at home.

CHAPTER III.

————— 'Tis better to be lowly born,
 And range with humble livers in content,
 Than to be perk'd up in a glittering grief,
 And wear a golden sorrow. SHAKESPEARE.

.....
 Be but my friend—I ask no dearer name!

SHENSTONE.

THE various letters Althea had received from her sisters had by no means given her a higher idea of matrimony. They had all married according to their own wishes, and excepting Harriet, with a very fair prospect of happiness; and even she, in the eyes of the world, had perhaps the fairest, though the fastidious Althea could not be brought to think so. Every letter from Mrs. Arlingham was written in the very spirit of opposition, and detailed perpetual, though not very serious quarrels, or in a querulous, discontented style, which seemed determined to be displeased. Isabella's were evidently written under extreme de-

pression of mind, anxious by occasional, but laboured assurances of happiness, to convey an idea of domestic comfort, which might have deceived one less affectionately observant than Althea. Mrs. Vernon, indeed, gave occasionally such an account of Isabella's health and Philipson's conduct, as, though much softened from the truth, alarmed Althea, and rendered her doubly desirous to get home. Lady Randolph seldom wrote at all, but her account of herself, when she did, was a struggle between a desire of appearing quite satisfied, and a degree of disappointment she was afraid or ashamed to own. She did acknowledge that lord Randolph's temper and health were certainly worse than she had expected; and that his sister, lady Lucretia Falkland, who continued to reside with them, was a very interfering, sour, disagreeable inmate. She owned, too, that she lived extremely retired; "but still," she added, "I live in the midst of splendour and luxury, and I had rather live for

ever alone in my own style, than submit to such privations as I should have found at my mother's or Isabella's, or visited such people as they were satisfied with. My life is not much varied certainly ; but I eat off plate, of every delicacy—I tread on velvet—I repose on down—and I may, if I please, cover my person with jewels, and have a servant to raise my hand to my head. Thus, you see, having so many enjoyments, I must be very happy ; and I assure you *I* am, but I dare say you would not. I wish, indeed, the roads were better in winter, that I could use my carriage, or that my lord would let me ride on horseback, to which he has a great objection. Indeed he never rides himself, and does not like I should go out without him or lady Lucretia, so that I have hardly been out at all since I came here. But the place is so magnificent, and the walks are so beautiful, I only regret that my lord is so much attached to etiquette as to think it improper that I should walk alone ; and as lady Lucretia never walks, I am obliged to have Gerald, the earl's con-

fidential servant, always at my heels, if I choose a ramble. This is irksome enough; but as I suppose every body pays a price of some sort for enjoyment, I must be thankful my tax is so light and so easily borne."

Whether Harriet really deceived herself as to his lordship's real meaning in these extraordinary restrictions, or whether she pierced through the flimsy veil of affected delicacy and love of etiquette, thrown thus artfully over the most tyrannic jealousy, Althea could not decide; but she was persuaded, from the whole tenor of her letters, that he was a positive, self-willed master, and that his wife was obliged to give way equally to himself and his sister, who was, most probably, a vigilant spy on all her actions. Nor was Gerald any other; and the haughty countess, though she would have fired at the bare insinuation of such a thing, was, in reality, strictly scrutinized by a servant, whose power over her husband was much greater than her own. For Harriet, however, Althea felt less pity than

for the other two; for she had yet a great degree of real enjoyment, even in the empty sound of "your ladyship," and in *possessing* luxuries, even if she could not *use* them. Such a character, to the well-regulated mind of Althea, was contemptible; and having gained that for which alone she married—magnificence and parade, she had no right to complain that she found no other source of happiness.

George Vernon had written once to Althea, in his usual cold manner, announcing his marriage, and enclosing a similar present to that he had sent to Isabella; and she had done all that was expected as proper or necessary, in writing to him and his insipid wife, whom she heartily despised, a letter of civil congratulation, in language as frigid as his own. Mrs. George Vernon was too uninteresting to inspire any thing more lively than contempt when she was casually remembered; it was too much trouble to hate her.

Mrs. Charlton's lawsuit was at length, in the beginning of August, finally deter-

mined in her favour, and then, for the first time, Althea openly expressed her anxious wish of returning immediately to England—a wish which her mother's last letter, announcing the final disposal of Fairfield away from Philipson, together with other domestic communications, very materially heightened. Mrs. Charlton's affairs required a few days longer at Dublin, and then she promised to return directly, and see what could be done to obviate some of the pecuniary difficulties which seemed to have overwhelmed the Philipsons. Mr. Arlingham's conduct she highly blamed—"It is unnatural, ungentlemanly, most ungenerous," said she. "'Tis true, he did not exactly promise the living in so many words, but he deceived him with false hopes; he has deceived him in a double sense, and kept the word of promise to his ear, and broke it to his hopes. As far as I can alleviate this sort of distress, I am ready, and doubly now do I rejoice at the favourable termination of my late suit, since, under different circumstances, I

must have *abridged* my assistance. I fear, however, to Isabella at least, there are other distresses, which no human interference will remove. Philipson seems to have been hurried by temporary trouble into a mode of conduct which will ensure permanent unhappiness, and in a case like this, the interposition of an angel would be of no effect. I had hoped he and Isabella would have retrieved Hymen's failing credit with you, Althea; but I fear his torch, if not extinguished, burns very faintly even there."

"On his part only, I am convinced," replied Althea. "I know my sister's heart so well, that it may break through unkindness and neglect, but will never feel the smallest diminution of love. Already my fears represent her to my imagination sinking slowly into an early grave through his neglect—his infidelity. Too mild, and loving him too well for reproach, she will silently fade away, and he will wonder she should have been unhappy, and perhaps disbelieve that she was so, because she

never upbraided or harassed him with complaints. Such are men! for since Philipson has deceived me, I must think ill of the whole race. Never shall they deceive me, for never will I place my own individual comfort in the keeping of any man breathing."

Mrs. Charlton could not help smiling at Althea's earnestness, though she truly participated in her feelings—"This is a bad moment to choose to prefer the petition of a lover," said she, when Althea had a little recovered her spirits and composure.

"It would indeed be unpropitious," replied Althea, "and so will every future one. Fortunately for me, I am not in much danger of being troubled with one."

"Unfortunately then, I suppose, at least for the poor petitioner, I hold a paper of that sort in my hand at this minute," answered Mrs. Charlton, holding up a letter.

Althea knew the writing—it was Vava-sour's, and her heart beat violently, though she hesitated for some time to receive it.

"When, or from whom, did you get this letter?" said she, as Mrs. Charlton threw it into her lap.

"I have had it about an hour in my possession, by the Shrewsbury clock," Mrs. Charlton returned, "and I received it from sir Montague Vavasour himself, who has been at my house this morning, accompanied by Miss Orford."

"Here! good Heavens! I thought he had been in England, and she at Fairlands. What strange juggling is this? and what can this letter contain, that they should both appear to partake in it?"

"Nay, I know not," Mrs. Charlton replied; "not an invitation to *their* wedding certainly. I believe it depends upon yourself, Althea, whether Miss Orford receives one to yours."

"Then she will not, depend upon it," said Althea.

Mrs. Charlton left her to read her packet, which, from its size, seemed to contain more than one letter. She opened it with a very tremulous hand, and perceived two

letters, one already opened, and addressed to sir Montague Vavasour at Charleville, in Miss Orford's writing. A slip of paper attached to this letter requested her to peruse it before she opened the one addressed to herself, as a necessary sort of explanation of what must otherwise appear extraordinary. All this preparation and ceremony increased Althea's agitation, already sufficiently excited by the idea of an offer of marriage from sir Montague, coming, as it did, just to put her resolution respecting matrimony to the test. She unfolded the unsealed letter, and looked at the signature; it was signed Constantia Orford, and she read as follows:—

“MY DEAR MONTAGUE,

“The time is at length arrived for which I have long wished—the time which shews me your heart *sincerely* and wholly occupied by a woman who deserves your preference, and I believe returns it. In pronouncing Althea Vernon

worthy of *you*, I pay her the highest compliment our language affords; for well do I know your value. You must frequently have thought me a very selfish being, Vavasour, seeing, as I did, the repugnance with which you thought of the forced bonds which contracted us to each other, particularly when it must be evident to me, as it was to many others, that only the most delicate and refined generosity on your part, an unwillingness to place me wholly in the power of such a man as Patrick Orford, prevented your breaking those vows which *your heart*, at least, never sanctioned. But let me, if possible, hasten to exonerate myself from such an imputation, which must be doubly odious, since, had I at once declared you free, my only penalty would have been wealth, which I have never appeared to appropriate or enjoy. Had I done this four years back, what would have been your fate at this moment? You would have been the husband of that intolerable virago, Anne Woodthorpe, with whom you fancied your-

self so madly in love, that had you then been free, you would have married her in spite of all advice and opposition. How often have you since blessed even the chains which then so cruelly galled you, and that penetration, which my cooler judgment allowed me to exercise in my opinion of that lady! Would you have been happier with that insipid fine lady, lady Jane Dormer, who again for a short time enchanted you with a siren's voice and an angel's face? The fact is, no man likes the woman whom he believes himself bound in honour to marry, but fancies every other more calculated to render him happy. I knew you too well, as well as the ladies themselves, to think they would contribute eventually to your domestic felicity; and I was determined not to give you freedom till I saw you were *truly* attached, from esteem and principle, to a woman whose character assimilated—who had sense, temper, and stability of mind and manners equal to your own—one too whom I could believe not in-

different to your virtues. Such a one you have now, I think, found. As surely as I dare pronounce on any human being, I do not hesitate to answer for all this in Miss Vernon. And now, Vavasour, you are free as air. I am ready to relinquish that portion of my fortune which I have no longer either the right or the wish to retain; and in doing this I shall not impoverish, but, in fact, enrich myself. This, you will say, is one of Constantia's paradoxes, which she loves so dearly. Let me expound it. I have, or had, an income of nearly *six* thousand a year—I have never exceeded *one* in my expenditure, at least not for these last six years, that I have been looking forward to this very point at which we are now arrived. The accumulation therefore is my own, and leaves me as rich a woman as I was before. I know so well your liberal temper, my dear cousin, that could you cede your right to the portion I thus willingly give up, you would do it; but *this* is strictly provided against, and you

ist be *too rich*, in spite of yourself. I am well aware of the character I have borne in consequence of this procedure of mine, for which no one could account, which concerned no one, but which every body chose to censure. Still let them wonder and condemn. I live not for the world, but for my own heart and my approbation. Thus far then I have, I hope, acquitted myself to you. Remember, however, that when I say I believe as Vernon is attached to you preferably to any other man, I speak from observation merely. She highly esteems you, I am sure; but she is too delicate to make *love* apparent, except to one interested, as I am, to fathom the secret. Love then to me is nothing, since never can I now talk of marriage. Let me find my happiness in the assurance of yours, and in being considered, through life, as the *best friend* of Montague and Althea. Fare-
I!

CONSTANTIA ORFORD."

CHAPTER IV.

With mean disguise, let others nature hide,
And mimic virtue with the paint of art;
I scorn the cheat of reason's foolish pride,
And boast the graceful weakness of my heart.

HAMMOND.

ALTHEA's surprise and emotion at this letter of Miss Orford's, for some minutes, overcame the interest she felt to peruse the one addressed to herself. Highly as she had lately thought of that lady, she now found every sentiment of esteem and regard heightened by such truly-generous conduct. It was very evident, from Miss Orford's letter, and had been so from her manner, in speaking of sir Montague Vavasour, that she was very much attached to him; and Althea could not help feeling for her, even amidst the glow of pleasure which, we must own, pervaded her own bosom at the idea of being herself

the object of his choice. Certain it is, Althea experienced at that moment some sensations very inimical to her intentions of living and dying an old maid; but after a time, she recollected her determination on that subject, and became more composed.

The letter from sir Montague contained, as she expected, an offer of his hand, and an assurance that she had possessed his heart ever since he first saw her at Farnham, when only the idea that she was engaged, or at least attached, to Mr. Wrottesley, had prevented his giving unchecked indulgence to the sentiments she had inspired. The letter contained much lover-like eloquence, and a request that she would admit him at their mutual friend, Mrs. Charlton's, and allow him to submit his proposals, and talk of settlements to Mrs. Vernon. Althea's heart again beat high with hope and love; for thus authorised to analyse her feelings, she found she really had a much greater regard for the baronet than she had sus-

pected. She immediately carried her letters to Mrs. Charlton, and desired her advice and assistance on the subject.

“ You ask my advice, my dear,” said Mrs. Charlton ; “ but I much suspect it is, as many others do, after you have determined how to act. However that may be, it is impossible for me to advise, in a case which must, after all, depend on your own feelings and ideas. You know my opinion of marriage in general, to which you seem to have leaned ; at the same time, I must own, I think both your own character and sir Montague’s are such as to promise a far greater share of happiness than is usually found in that state. You are neither of you romantic—you will have a large share of worldly gifts, and nothing to fear from that tremendous rock, poverty, which wrecks so many youthful adventurers. At the same time, some of your notions on this subject are peculiar, and you are not of a temper to be happy if those ideas are disappointed. I fear to advise. But I could wish you had some time allowed for delibera-

tion, before you give a final answer to sir Montague. He knows you too well to suspect you for a moment of coquetry in demanding this. There is such a wide difference between saying what you would do, if such a thing *did happen*, and deciding when it actually *does*. Consult your own heart, however; for, after all, that will be *your* best counsellor, though I would not commit every girl in such circumstances to one so apt to be partially prejudiced."

Althea did give some hours to solitude and consideration; and her decision, when submitted to Mrs. Charlton's judgment, was more approved by her than by sir Montague Vavasour. Althea did not indeed reject him altogether; but she required, what he himself was forced to allow not unreasonable, a longer acquaintance, before she actually agreed to become his wife.

"Recollect," said she, when in the evening he appeared at Mrs. Charlton's house to learn his fate, "recollect how little we

have really seen or known of each other. You appear to have been tolerably susceptible more than once—I never felt for any other the esteem and regard I feel for you, nor ever shall; but I cannot persuade myself to take upon trust, even from the most general and liberal report, the character of the man I am to marry, nor do I wish he should of mine. I agree with Mrs. Charlton that a courtship of ten years would not enable either of us to decide on the real temper of the other; but the essentials of *character* we may. What have you ever seen of mine?"

"All that makes you dear and estimable," replied sir Montague.

"I believe I may say the same of you," she answered; "but let me have time to decide from my own observation of you, as well as from the report of others. I once thought as highly of Mr. Philipson as I do of you, and fondly fancied my sister's happiness secured in an union with him. See how I was mistaken, and you will not wonder that I am unwilling to answer

rashly to a question of so much importance. Besides, my opinion has really hitherto so entirely been in favour of celibacy—I have so decidedly, from attentive observation, given the Balance of Comfort to the single ladies, that I cannot hastily retract. I have seen many women, certainly, very uncomfortable in that state, but I know some who are really *happy*, perfectly happy; whereas, in the married state, I have never met with a single instance in which the cares have not greatly outweighed the comforts. And why should I expect a miracle in my favour?”

The logic of Vavasour was too lover-like to need repetition; and though it had no small effect on the heart of Althea, sufficiently disposed to admit its truth from his lips, she did not swerve from her resolution of taking more time for reflection. The idea of Vavasour had never been presented to her unconnected with that of Miss Orford, till the period which brought him as a lover to herself; and she therefore could not feel herself perfectly

qualified to decide on a question so very unexpectedly put. That she thought of him most highly is certain, but it was from the report of others; and though those who spoke thus well of him had known him long, and might be well able to judge of him, she knew that there were many circumstances, which, though trifling in themselves, were of infinite importance in wedded life to all, and particularly to one so fastidious as herself. She had no wish to marry; she had no horror at being styled an old maid; and she had been so much accustomed to look at marriage with a very doubtful eye as to its superior comforts, that she was the more firmly resolved, as she more gravely reflected, not to marry unless she found her happiness would be increased by it.

Many advantages offered in the connexion proposed to her with sir Montague Vavasour. His character was exemplary, his family ancient and of consequence, and his fortune such as to preserve her from every evil attendant on poverty, or

even pecuniary embarrassment, which she believed was the cause of Philipson's strange change of conduct; it was, too, such as would enable her to remove many of *his* difficulties, and thus restore him to his former manners and habits, and remove Isabella's great source of unhappiness. And this last argument was the one of most weight in Vavasour's favour. Althea little suspected the total change which had taken place in Philipson's conduct, nor how entirely he was under the influence of an artful woman and an unprincipled man, whose pecuniary favours had given him a degree of power which he took care to exert, restrained by no feeling of delicacy. Mrs. Fermor, however, was obliged to be very circumspect in her behaviour before Mr. Molyneux; for though she liked Philipson better, she knew he could not support her if she left the other; and it was more conjecture than any possibility of certainty, which induced the reports, which at length reach-

ed the unhappy Isabella, and which unfortunately her own observation and Philipson's carelessness but too surely confirmed. Certainly the change in his manners and behaviour, though not known or suspected in their utmost extent, influenced Althea's decision towards sir Montague Vavasour, who, after much waste of tender rhetoric, found he could gain no farther advantage, than that if she did not marry him, she never would marry at all, and that nothing should induce her to enter into that state, the time she was so wretched about her favourite sister.

"If," said she, finally, "at the end of six months I find Isabella happier, and can bring myself to think of the married state in a more favourable light than I do at present, I will be yours—if I feel a *conviction* that celibacy will make me happier, I expect you will not accuse me of coquetry, if I decide upon remaining single. So highly do I think of you, that if I cannot promise myself happiness with

you, I shall never expect to find it with any other man, and I will be yours or my own."

With this the baronet was at last obliged to be contented; and as, at any rate, Althea assured him of her warmest friendship, he prepared to attend her and Mrs. Charlton to England.

The will of the late Mr. Orford had been so positively worded, that Vavasour found himself absolutely incapacitated from returning any part of Miss Orford's forfeited property. She did not, however, refuse his earnest request, made with the truest sincerity, that she would consent to retain the whole till he really was married, since it was at least an uncertainty; and situated as he was with Althea, he could hardly call himself even an engaged man; nor could any one pronounce him rejected by Miss Orford, but those who loved her too well to mention their information upon the subject.

The few days Althea passed in Ireland after this affair were spent by Miss Orford

at Mrs. Charlton's house; and so entirely did she become attached to Althea, now that unlimited confidence in each other discarded all constraint, that she found it too painful to part. She therefore accepted Mrs. Charlton's invitation to accompany them to England; and the good people of Ireland who interested themselves in her affairs, were effectually deceived into a belief that her engagements with sir Montague still subsisted.

CHAPTER V.

And what art thou, thou idol Ceremony?

What kind of god art thou, that sufferest more

Of mortal griefs than do thy worshippers?

What are thy rents? what are thy comings-in?

Oh Ceremony! shew me but thy worth.

SHAKESPEARE.

Mrs. Charlton had promised Althea, when they went to Ireland, to stop a few days at lord Randolph's on their return, pro-

vided they were acceptable guests at the castle. They accordingly ordered their horses for that place, without any great expectation, however, of a pleasant visit, or any temptation, even from Harriet herself, to exceed their original plan of remaining three days. Althea anticipated a great deal of annoying magnificence, very little comfort, and no real happiness; and this she expected as much from the countess's own letters as from any thing else.

The drive through the park was strikingly beautiful, now diversified by the changing hues of just-commencing autumn, and Althea thought she could be well content never to go beyond its boundaries, if she might stray within them alone and at liberty, or select her companions; that, she knew, was not Harriet's case; and she began to dread whether the stately old earl and punctilious lady Lucretia Falkland might not be rather offended than pleased by this abrupt *entrée* without leave or notice. But Va-

vasour answered for their politeness, though he would not vouch for their sincerity; and the castle was soon before them. A train of highly-powdered servants, in blue velvet liveries, richly embroidered with gold, appeared on the steps at the sound of the carriages; and the names of Mrs. Charlton and Miss Vernon, sir Montague Vavasour and Miss Orford, rang from one to the other, and soon reached the grand saloon, where the earl and countess, lady Lucretia Falkland, his sister, and the ladies Drusilla and Clorinda, his aunts, sat in as much state as if they were expecting half the peerage. Harriet's heart was not one of those which fly out to meet a long absent friend; strictly attentive to ceremony, she advanced to meet her sister and Mrs. Charlton with all the dignity of a countess, and was equally polite, graceful, and indifferent to them as to sir Montague and Miss Orford. Lord Randolph received his guests with great urbanity, and every wish to appear amiable; and the tedious formality of in-

introductions and low courtesies having been happily accomplished, they all seated themselves in uncomfortable state, and a few general topics were coldly discussed; for the old ladies would have reckoned it very ill-bred to have introduced any particular discourse relative to lady Randolph's own family affairs, as that could only be an interesting subject to those whom it concerned, and of this Mrs. Charlton and Althea were aware.

"You remain with us a few days, of course," said Harriet, in a tone not much like invitation, to her sister.

Althea looked at Mrs. Charlton, who replied, that one day was all they were able to afford, particular business requiring their presence at home. Harriet bowed, and seemed satisfied to have it so. A dinner, magnificently grand, silent, heavy, and tiresome, was announced; and Althea saw, with more dismay than satisfaction, a fine full-dressed man, with an immense bouquet in his button-hole, behind every chair, whilst three more presided at a sideboard.

groaning under the weight of gilt plate; off which sumptuous metal she saw they were all to eat. There had been no time for any change, in consequence of company going in, and she therefore concluded this was the usual mode of living; and she pitied Harriet for being condemned to the slavery of so much grandeur, which, to judge by her manner and countenance, did not appear much connected with happiness.

Our travellers were not epicures, and had made their dinner long enough before the rest to feel tired and disgusted with the continuance of the scene. Althea, indeed, little accustomed to such gloomy state, never made a worse meal; for she hated French dishes, which chiefly composed the cookery before her, and felt half afraid to ask the supercilious gentleman behind the chair for any thing she wanted. Harriet seemed far from comfortable—she tasted of every thing, but eat nothing—hardly spoke a word; and Althea observed that Gerald, who stood at his lord's chair,

in a plain suit of black, with a white waistcoat, and a brilliant brooch and ring, watched her during the whole of the dinner, particularly if she addressed herself to Vavasour.

Notwithstanding the earl's attempts at being sociable and pleasant, and no man had it more in his power when he pleased, the evening passed away very heavily; for Harriet appeared afraid to talk, lest the two old aunts should find something to turn to a wrong sense; and having but little communication with any of her family, could hardly answer the questions Althea ventured to put, after the rest of the party had seated themselves at cards and chess. The evening was uncommonly lovely, and Althea asked her sister to walk on the lawn. The old ladies exchanged a glance; and Harriet, looking half alarmed at such a request having been made, said she never walked. Miss Olford had enough to do to observe the odd figures, dresses, and manners of these old women, who surpassed any thing she had

ever seen on the stage; and she longed for a *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Charlton, to laugh them over, for she plainly saw, from the increasing gravity of Althea's features, that nothing like mirth or laughter would suit there.

The ladies Drusilla and Clorinda Falkland were twins, and about fifteen years older than their nephew the earl. They seemed formed in exactly the same mould, both as to face and form—the same little long eyes, with eyebrows arched to the top of the forehead, like a piece of black thread plastered on, and no eyelashes—the same prim button-mouth—the same turned-up nose; and complexions as yellow as the old point-lace lappets they wore at the back of their flat heads. Their figure was tall, and the waist the same size from the hip to the shoulder, nothing approaching to a *bosom* being visible. They wore large hoops—treble ruffles—rich brocades, made in the fashion of the sixteenth century, with embroidered stomachers and diamond stay-hooks. They

wore their grey hair, which shone as if rubbed with plate-powder, and looked very like a mass of silver, tightly stretched over a very high cushion, and at the summit of the pyramid laid a very flat cap of yellow lace, with long lappets, and a profusion of old-fashioned diamond pins were stuck through the hair; the same valuable gems were lavishly spread over the rest of their persons. Lady Lucretia, who was only about sixty-two, considered herself quite a chicken, compared with her aunts, and secretly regretted that a very distorted shape prevented her dressing more fashionably. But the old-fashioned negligee was too favourable to an unlucky protuberance behind, to be exchanged for a more modern dress; and the old ladies readily took as a compliment to themselves that mode of adornment, which was, in reality, adopted to hide defects. Her mind was as crooked as her body; and she watched the countess with a jealous assiduity, and reported whatever she disliked to the earl.

with a malignant ill-nature, which made Harriet more unhappy than she would allow. His lordship was naturally of a suspicious temper; and aware how ill his years matched with hers, was always watching for some appearance of levity or unbecoming gaiety of which he might complain.

Lady Randolph, however, was soon aware of this, and adapted her behaviour to his ideas of right rather than her own. She had not married for happiness, but for grandeur; she was therefore not disappointed at finding herself uncomfortable from his temper, and could frequently find a solace in magnificence for the absence of comfort. But Harriet did not look merely at the present; she calculated her own age and her lord's, and she sometimes felt the consideration of widowhood necessary to support her under her present provocations. By conforming *now* to his whims and fancies, she believed she was providing much good for futurity, and anticipated a rich amends for her present compliances,

in a splendid addition to her large jointure. The old aunts, and lady Lucretia also, would probably go off the stage about the same time, and she would thus be at once wholly emancipated. The loss of the anxiously-desired heir had greatly vexed her as well as the rest, for she believed a son would give her much present and future consequence and power. She was, however, again in the family-way, and the natural indolence of her temper and habits reconciled her to spending three parts of her days on a sofa, her last disappointment having been traced by the indefatigable spinsters to a sudden turn of her ankle in walking on a gravel-walk. All this she set forth to Althea, in an interview they had by themselves before the prying aunts descended in the morning, and she endeavoured to persuade her of the utility of her plan, and the pleasure of her prospects.

"I almost shudder," said Althea, with a feeling of disgust she could not check, "at the idea of any woman looking for-

ward to the state of a widow with glee, and as a *recompence*."

"But who would marry such a man as lord Randolph, and live as I do, surrounded by such people, with spies in my very servants, and not so look forward?"

"I can say nothing to such feelings excited by such a situation," replied Althea, coldly. "I would not so have married. I find it impossible to argue a case I cannot understand; and I fervently pray that I may never be so circumstanced as to be able to comprehend your present sentiments. Surely no personal enjoyments, no luxurious indulgences, can make amends for such feelings as these—to say nothing of the *morality* of the business."

"Every one to their taste," said Harriet, indignantly. "If lord Randolph behaved differently, I should think and feel otherwise. If I am very culpable, he must answer for it; I certainly look forward to the future repaying me for the present, and that without any compunction; and would

not exchange situations with Isabella; though I own mine far from happiness. And you, Althea, when hereafter you see me emerge from this state of trial, and enjoying its rewards, will agree with me that riches are better than poverty."

"I agree to that now," said Althea; "I only object to obtaining wealth by the subversion of every good feeling—almost by the sacrifice of principle itself. I do not deny that you may be happier without lord Randolph, but I must regret that you should have gone to the altar with a man with whom you did not even hope for happiness, independently of situation, and which was to be permanently obtained by his death. Such sentiments, at such a moment particularly, must be dreadful."

Harriet felt the truth of Althea's words, though she would not own it, and was at once vexed and angry with her and herself. Althea found, with more sorrow than surprise, that lord Randolph was not sufficiently generous, nor her sister prudent enough, to assist Philipson farther than

by cancelling the debt of two hundred pounds, and making it a gift. Harriet's allowance was large, but her desire of change and variety in her clothes and ornaments, even in that secluded place, was as great as if she lived in the gay world, and kept her always poor. Some acts of munificence she was obliged to perform as countess of Randolph, from whom something was expected amongst the villagers and indigent tenants; and ostentation, if no better motive, prompted some little exertions in the charitable way, amongst patriotic subscriptions, and such public benefactions as recorded the name of the giver.

Characters so totally unlike as hers and Althea's could not even be comfortable together; and her lately-expressed sentiments had given so much disgust, and indeed offence, to the pure and well-principled mind of Althea, that she hailed with pleasure the second morning of their visit, which was to carry her away from scenes of such gloomy magnificence and unsatisfactory splendour.

The sisters parted even less affection-

ately than they had met, and Althea's former feelings of compassion at Harriet's want of comfort were lost in contempt:

CHAPTER VI.

Ye fair,

Be greatly cautious of your sliding hearts;
Dare not the infectious sigh—the pleading look,
Downcast and low, in meek submission drest,
But full of guile.

THOMSON.

“UPON my word,” said Miss Orford, when they stopped at a comfortable inn to dine, and Althea had left the room, “upon my word, Mrs. Charlton, I am quite delighted to find myself out of the precincts of that horrid castle, and at a distance from the Abomeique of it. The very air breathed of gloom and insupportable grandeur. How her ladyship can exist there, I cannot make out, with that hideous crew.”

“Surely you will allow the place is

beautiful and very superb," replied Mrs. Charlton.

"Oh, very much so! and the old ladies are very superb, and may have been beautiful too, but they are not to my taste, nor the place either. Then those dreadful velvet beds, with their canopied tops and waving plumes of feathers—I always expected to see all the avenues closed, and a set of horses caparisoned appropriately, and find myself drawn off as if in my hearse, and laid in a snug grave before morning. I looked at yours, which being crimson, was rather less terrific; but mine of dark green, and Althea's of black, really looked truly funereal. I wish, those old women would cut them up into robes, instead of those rustling silks, which always annoyed me with the idea of a violent rain. Oh Heavens! give me fifty pounds a-year, and the liberty of spending it how and where I like, and of moving or sitting still as I please, rather than such vast riches unenjoyed, and without the power of walking or riding but as I am ordered or permitted.

That countess is an odious woman, and I had rather the bashaw should plague her than any one else."

The entrance of Althea changed the conversation, and they then settled their plans for the rest of the journey. It was agreed that Vavasour was to go to Charleville, and that the three ladies should go to Westhaven for a day or two, as it was not much out of their way, and Althea did not expect soon to leave Isabella, whose situation she apprehended was very uncomfortable. Mrs. Vernon was then in town on business, and unable to go immediately to the vicarage.

Sir Montague parted very unwillingly from Althea, to whom every day rendered him still more attached, as it shewed him some new excellence in her character. Nor did he lose in her estimation by being more known. Circumstanced as she feared she should find the Philipsons, she dared not accede to his wish of being allowed to visit her there, at least at present; but she permitted him to write occasionally, if he

had any thing to say particularly interesting, and she promised to write in return, if his letters required answering.

"A lover has always something to say which ought to be interesting," said he, significantly.

"But you are not yet invested with that title, nor do lovers always say much to the purpose," she replied. "If you do write, I prohibit love as the topic."

"Yes, the *only* topic perhaps, or the *prevailing* one; but I must touch upon it a little."

"The less the better," said she. "I am going *from* scenes and *to* scenes which will but little assist your cause, I fear."

The visit to Mrs. Arlingham was not marked by any thing particular, either good or bad. There was no appearance of any happiness, nor were there, as heretofore, any violent disputes. Each seemed to do as he or she wished, independently of the other, and they seemed to have arrived at the very highest pitch of indifference. Arlingham was a great deal more from home

than he used to be, and Elizabeth dozed on a sofa, or read novels half the day—spent a great deal of time at her toilet—and, Mrs. Charlton feared, from what she gathered from the indignant old housekeeper, flirted more than was decorous, with a handsome young man who was just come to a large estate in the neighbourhood, and had nothing else to do.

Mr. Germaine not expecting visitors, was sitting with her in great apparent intimacy, when Althea ran before the servant to announce herself on their first arrival; but she was herself too circumspect to suspect Mrs. Arlingham of errors of that kind, and therefore did not observe the confusion of both parties on her entrance; but Mrs. Charlton, more conversant with the world, did. *She* too thought that Arlingham looked very coldly at Mr. Germaine, and observed that he very seldom spoke to the young man, or seconded Elizabeth's invitation for the next day, which she never failed to give him at parting in the evening.

Miss Orford agreed with Mrs. Charlton in thinking something was wrong, and that Elizabeth was in great danger of falling into a fatal error, both through her own vanity, indolence, and want of thought, and her husband's neglect. The subject was almost too delicate to be mentioned to Mrs. Arlingham by any one out of her own family, and Mrs. Charlton feared to alarm Althea, or add to the many distressing thoughts she already had for her sisters. But she could not, she believed, consistently with her duty, leave Elizabeth unwarned of her danger, and she spoke to her on the subject, as the privileged friend of her mother and herself. Of such privileges, however, Elizabeth had no proper idea, and in very indignant language avowed her perfect innocence of any improper behaviour, either to or from Mr. Germaine. She flatly told Mrs. Charlton she assumed an authority she had no right to exercise over her, and that she should never recollect her conduct without resentment—"In fact," she added, "even if I were blam-

able in the way your *friendship* suggests, Mr. Arlingham has set me the example by his own infidelities. He has renewed the affair with Kitty Summers, which he promised me to give up, and I am neglected and despised for that vulgar, painted, dressed-up minx. Mr. Germaine is a sensible, elegant, pleasant young man, introduced here by Arlingham himself; and I shall not refuse the pleasure of an agreeable companion, to humour the fancies of my own mother even, or of any fastidious, disappointed old maid in Christendom."

To this vulgar personality Mrs. Charlton deigned no reply, and Mrs. Arlingham withdrew to blush for it herself, when passion had given way to reason. Mrs. Charlton had opened her eyes to the growing preference she was soon conscious of feeling for the insidious Germaine, and she endeavoured to keep him more at a distance. But she had given him too much liberty to find that easy, and was obliged to content herself with being more on her

guard in her own treatment of him, at least whilst her visitors were with her.

Althea did not like the man, but she could not for a moment suspect that her sister did but too well. She avoided, as much as she could, all domestic discussions, particularly as she found Elizabeth disposed to be very bitter against her husband, of whose revived intrigue she was soon informed, with every angry comment indignation could supply, her own provoking conduct being carefully suppressed. Althea had never found expostulation or advice of any avail; and finding the ill-matched pair at least more peaceable, she left her in the hope that those violent altercations which had formerly disgraced them both, were sunk in the quieter, if not more felicitous, system of complete indifference. She found nothing at Westhaven certainly to advance sir Montague's hopes, for matrimony appeared in a very unfavourable garb there; even when divested of storms, its clouds of sullen indifference were almost equally appalling.

Elizabeth was at this time, too, in rather better temper than common, for Germaine flattered her vanity, and Arlingham had consented to her going with him to Randolph Castle in October—a scheme which she contemplated with great delight. Althea's account of what she called solemn and fatiguing grandeur, seemed the height of every thing desirable to the ambitious Elizabeth, who appeared to have adopted, by intuition, the same sentiments respecting the *future* as Harriet, and to think the liberty and happiness of rich and youthful widowhood cheaply purchased by a year or two of imprisonment in such a magnificent solitude. As to the possibility of the earl outliving his young wife, or the probability of his continuing so long as to spoil her claims to *youthful* widowhood, that she would not think of, but anticipated for Harriet all the charms of independence, wealth, and rank.

Althea did not attempt to controvert these opinions, well aware that in minds of such a kindred stamp as these two sisters,

the answer would be much the same, and they would equally despise and deride her absurd notions.

Elizabeth, for the first time, saw Althea depart without a wish to retain her longer, for she had no particular point to carry with Arlingham in which her influence might be useful, and she felt that she rather shrunk from her observation on Mr. Germaine.

They parted without any great degree of warmth, and the travellers proceeded to Mrs. Charlton's house together, where they were to leave Miss Orford, and then Mrs. Charlton was to conduct Althea to Mrs. Philipson's. At Torrington they found Mrs. Amy Finch, as gay, and pleasant, and happy as ever. She and Miss Orford were soon great friends, and they called themselves the quartette of old maids. Miss Orford declared that Althea did not belong to them, and that in spite of all her assertions, sir Montague Vavasour would yet carry off his prize.

Satisfied with leaving Miss Orford in

such good hands, Mrs. Charlton desired the ladies to make themselves happy, and she and Althea stepped into her carriage, a day or two earlier than they would have done had they left Constantia alone; and a rapid journey brought them, in a few hours, in sight of the vicarage.

CHAPTER VII.

I rue the riches of my former state;
 Sweet comfort's blasted clusters I lament;
 I tremble at the blessings once so dear,
 And every pleasure pains me to the heart. YOUNG.

THE contrast between the present visit to Feltham and the last forcibly struck our travellers, and the eyes of Althea were blinded by tears, and her heart sunk as she glanced rapidly over the altered appearance of every thing around her. The garden, so lately the receptacle of every thing

sweet, and useful, and ornamental, looked ragged and neglected—the hedges were wild that used to be so neatly trimmed and kept in order—the grass on the lawn was full of weeds, and waved to the blast —“and every thing denoted a careless desolation.”

As they approached the gate, Althea saw a coarse-looking, awkward girl, with the infant in her arms, who stared a moment at the carriage, and then bustled into the house to announce it. Isabella had, in fact, beheld its approach, but so many bitter sensations swelled at her full heart, that she could not compose herself sufficiently to go forth and meet those whom it contained. Cruelly did she too revert to a similar arrival, and this moment seemed almost the most painful in her life.

“Isabella is very ill, I’m sure,” said Althea, “for she comes not to receive us. And where is Mr. Philipson?”

An old woman, after some little time, made her appearance, and assisted the ladies from the carriage.

"How is Mrs. Philipson?" said Mrs. Charlton, seeing Althea utterly unable to speak.

"Ill enough, I'm afraid," returned the woman.

"And where is Mr. Philipson?" resumed Mrs. Charlton.

"Oh! at the Lea, as usual, where he ought not to be," replied the woman, who was one of those blunt old people who say all they think, whether right or wrong.

No more questions were asked; and leaving the woman to assist the footman in emptying the carriage, Mrs. Charlton silently gave her arm to Althea, and they turned to the house.

The meeting was indeed most painful to all parties, for remembrance was busy in drawing a cruel contrast, whilst the sadly-altered countenance of Isabella bore testimony to much mental suffering, and her meagre form too forcibly bespoke bodily decay. Tears for some time usurped the place of words, but at length mutual in-

quiries began to give something more of comfort and tranquillity to all parties.

The children were introduced ; and little Althea, who began to talk and grow entertaining, was of great use in cheering the melancholy party. But in every thing Mrs. Charlton and Althea traced the visible effects of neglect and misery. The house no longer bore that exquisite look of neatness and comfort it formerly did—that cheerful, animated sort of moving quiet, which the happy feel, though it cannot be described. The parlour was littered with the dolls and toys of the little girl, and the saucepan and boat, out of which the infant had been feeding, yet stood upon the table. In two or three places Althea observed that the fringe was loose from the curtain, and the bordering from the paper. The little boy did not look as his sister had done at his age, nor did the manner in which he was carried by his clumsy nurse tend to show to advantage the beautiful habiliments in which *Althea* had looked so lovely. Mrs. Phi-

lipson herself, though perfectly neat, had yet a look of careless self-neglect, for which her pensive manner and pallid cheek offered a too eloquent reason. The young Althea was the only one of this family group who looked as she used to do, and on her the cares of her fond mother had been proudly lavished to deck her darling to advantage. She was indeed a most beautiful creature; and being somewhat awed by strangers, and kept in good-humour by some pretty toys they had brought her, she left them persuaded she was the sweetest child in existence.

The anxious eyes of poor Isabella during the evening were continually turned towards the watch which hung on the chimneypiece, and her varying cheek at every noise proclaimed her expectation of her husband's arrival. The table was set, and every thing ready for supper, yet still, with many apologies to Mrs. Charlton, she delayed sitting down. However, at half-past nine she owned she believed it

useless to wait his coming any longer, and, with a deep sigh, she took her place.

"*I should not have expected him,*" said she, "*but I sent him word this morning that I hoped you would be here this evening.*"

Mrs. Charlton tried to apologize for him in a laughing manner; and Althea, unwilling to embitter still more this first meeting, asked no questions which could lead to the discussion she dreaded, and knew must take place in time. She endeavoured, by a recital of events which had passed in Ireland, and an account of their flying visit to lady Mandolph, to amuse her sister, and draw her mind from dwelling on the disrespectful neglect Philipson's absence evinced towards their best friend, to whom he, and all of them, owed so much. For herself, she felt no regret at his conduct in this instance, but she was hurt at it on Mrs. Charlton's account, though she knew her too well to fear she should resent it. Her efforts to amuse Isabella, in some measure,

succeeded; and when, in the only moment they reverted by words to less pleasing topics, Isabella hinted at Philipson's disappointment respecting Fairfield, and consequently increased embarrassments, Mrs. Charlton, in the most kind and delicate manner, assured her she had accompanied Althea for the express purpose of giving all the assistance in her power towards relieving, at least, the most pressing difficulties; and poor Isabella retired to her solitary pillow, with a heart somewhat relieved of its worst apprehensions.

Althea was very desirous of accompanying Mrs. Charlton to her room, for the double purpose of assisting her to undress, no person *now* in Isabella's household appearing proper for such an office, and to have some conversation on all the sad changes they had mutually remarked and lamented. But Mrs. Charlton saw that her young friend had been sufficiently agitated, and not only refused to admit her herself, but effectually prevented the meditated plan of the two sisters of sitting up

half the night to discuss afflicting topics, which could answer no good purpose. Accordingly they retired separately, each to her own apartment, and by this good management were able to meet in the morning with more composure, though the heavy eyes of Althea proclaimed her want of rest, and the subject of her waking solitudes.

The following morning disclosed to the observant Althea many unpleasant circumstances which she had not remarked the evening before. She found her sister almost entirely a nurse, for she had no one to assist her in that department but the awkward girl before mentioned, who was likewise housemaid, the old woman coming only occasionally to help when company or *Philipson* were expected. One bad consequence, amongst many others, was evident from this circumstance. Unable to attend properly and fully to both the children, and unwilling to neglect the most helpless, Isabella had been obliged to indulge Althea in every wayward whim, in

order to keep her quiet. Whilst the baby slept she was bribed to silence by every absurd want being gratified, and the consequence was, that a refusal at any other time provoked a violent and incessant screaming, till fatigue obliged her mother to grant what she ought to have steadily denied. Two or three of these fits destroyed all the comfort of the breakfast-table; for, accustomed to make one there, the child would not stay with the maid, who asserted she had enough to do with the baby, and could not manage them both.

Isabella vainly checked the noisy child, who had evidently seldom been so spoken to before; and Mrs. Charlton, though conscious it originated in that extravagance on the part of Philipson which forbade proper attendants at home, and had reduced his wife to a state of ill health, could not help thinking, that if such scenes were common at his own table, it was not so much to be wondered at that he sought for different ones elsewhere. Isabella look-

ed hurried and distressed at the little fury's screams; but Althea bade her remember that she was now with her to lighten her cares, and that the reformation of her self-willed little niece should speedily take place.

"The evil must be remedied in some measure," said Mrs. Charlton, when alone with Althea, "by placing Philipson's affairs in such a train as will afford his family the comforts and assistance proper and necessary for them. In Isabella's present precarious state of health, she cannot do every thing. She has never been accustomed to half the drudgery now imposed on her by a selfish and unprincipled husband; nor, were she in strong health, ought she to do it. Some regulations must immediately be made to render her situation more easy and comfortable, or I am afraid she will indeed sink under her distress and personal fatigue. If Philipson refuses me his confidence respecting his affairs, as I think it likely enough he will, I must serve *him* as well as he will

let me, and as well as I can. I will invest her, or rather you, with the means of providing a proper household, beyond his power to interfere with. I would most willingly take her and her children wholly from him, but I believe she yet loves him too well to bear even the mention of such a thing. I own I see but little future comfort for her, unless this fatal family at the Lea should quit the country. Arlingham has much to answer for, I think, in his behaviour to Philipson about Fairfield. I am afraid, Althea, this bodes no good to poor sir Montague."

"Oh, Heavens!" said Althea, "who after this shall dare to hope for wedded happiness? They must have more confidence in man, and in their own perfections, than I have, who venture upon matrimony. Vavasour will ever be a most dear friend; but a lover! oh, never! You look incredulous," she continued, observing that a smile stole over Mrs. Charlton's thoughtful face; "but can it be possible you doubt me? Only recall all that has pass-

ed in this last short year, and compare this family now with what we then found it. Recollect how happy; how blooming my poor sister then was—how kind, how attentive was her husband. Now she is fading fast away—dying of a broken heart—that fatal, cruel disease, which ‘kills so slowly, none dare call it murder.’ Neglected by her husband for one, I will venture to say, every way her inferior—languishing in ill health, without comforts, attendants, or proper assistance, and yet striving to save her unworthy tyrant a momentary pang, which, if he did feel it, would be forgotten in the next carousal at the house of that fatal friend, who has thus led him on from errors, to vices—your kindness will sooth the life which I am persuaded nothing can save, for the most effectual remedy, that of Philipson’s return to kindness and steady domestic habits, will still be withheld.”

“Let us hope better things, my love,” replied Mrs. Charlton, who, however, felt not the hope she endeavoured to inspire. “A, calm and placid mind may yet do

n
c
f
b
n

n
st
ar

much for Isabella, and the certainty of pecuniary assistance, as unlimited as his affairs may require, will yet, I trust, bring back Philipson to domestic comforts and regular habits."

Althea's heart swelled with grateful veneration towards the incomparable friend she found it impossible to thank by words, and she tried to hope for the best.

CHAPTER VIII.

~~~~~

—————Disgust conceal'd  
Is oftentimes proof of wisdom, when the fault  
Is obstinate, and proof beyond our reach. COWPER.

HOWEVER reluctantly, Philipson was obliged to make his appearance at home the day after Mrs. Charlton's arrival, for he knew too well her ability and wish to serve him, to dare to disoblige her by farther disrespect. The jokes and witticisms of his idle associates at the Lea, and the

affected endeavours of the sarcastic Mrs. Fermor to sooth his vexed spirit, sent him home in a very indifferent temper, which, though he feared to manifest towards Mrs. Charlton and Althea, shewed itself in a thousand little asperities to his wife and children. Mrs. Charlton was civil; but her manners were, in spite of every endeavour to the contrary, constrained, and he felt that she was only *polite*, not friendly. Althea took no pains to conceal her altered feelings towards him; and Philipson felt severely mortified, for he still loved, and greatly respected her. His wife received him as usual, with smiles, though it was very evident she felt something like fear every time he spoke or looked round, lest he should observe any thing which might call forth anger or reprehension. Althea soon found, with indignation she hardly knew how to repress, that her sister was afraid of him; and that he was weak enough to be proud of what would have made a sensible man ashamed. Philipson saw the impression he had made

on Althea's mind was very disagreeable, and tried to unbend. He affected to notice, with an appearance of kindness, that Isabella looked ill, at which her soft eyes filled with tears of grateful affection at such a mark of attention.

"Is this the *first* time you have made that observation, Mr. Philipson?" said Althea, pointedly.

He found he was wrong again, and remarked to himself how odd it sounded for Althea to call him "*Mr. Philipson*," instead of "Edward," or "brother," as she used to do. He next tried his little girl, and made advances to her; but the child had not lately been accustomed to his notice, and did not understand it. She clung to her mother, and set up one of her most tremendous screams.

"Take her away," said he, completely exasperated. "I never saw such a little fury in my life. She does but little credit to your management, Bella, I must acknowledge."

Althea's heart was on her lips; but

Mrs. Charlton observed her rising colour, and calmly recommended *her* taking out the refractory child, as it would prevent Mrs. Philipson's leaving the breakfast-table.

Althea was glad to profit by the hint, and she retired to indulge her tears, and endeavour to get rid of her angry feelings.

However much Philipson dreaded the idea of a whole day at home, he dared not attempt returning to the Lea, for he was fearful of provoking Mrs. Charlton to utter those truths he was fully conscious of deserving. Besides, she hinted, after breakfast, when Isabella went to attend to her domestic concerns, that she anxiously desired some conversation with him: and though he anticipated lectures as well as assistance, he was obliged to stay, and take the bad with the good. Putting by his fishing-rod, therefore, which he had taken up purposely to escape from home, he prepared to listen, very unwillingly, to such representations of his conduct as he felt must be just, however annoying. This mode of proceeding was very oppo-

site to Mrs. Charlton's intentions. However much she might wish to reprehend Philipson, and place in its true light his very heinous conduct, she carefully avoided any thing of the kind at this time, for she was conferring on him pecuniary favours, and was much too delicate to take what appeared to her an ungenerous advantage, and combine at the same moment obligation and annoyance, from which he could not escape, and at which he dared not be indignant. She endeavoured to draw from him a full and accurate statement of all his debts, and offered to his approbation a plan which should prevent future embarrassments, and ensure a greater share of present comforts; but Philipson was ashamed to acknowledge the extent of the evil, and indeed afraid of an examination into the means by which but too many of his debts had been incurred. He was well aware that though Mrs. Charlton might be silent on the subject, he should appear to her in a character which, bad as he was, he yet shrunk to contemplate. He there-

fore confined his information to such circumstances as *imprudence* only had occasioned; and these debts, though sufficiently numerous to have made a less zealous friend draw back, were trifling, compared with those which vicious propensities had accumulated. Gaming debts were carefully kept in the background, because he was afraid to bring them forward, though by far the most pressing part of his anxieties.

Mrs. Fernor's favours too were not gratuitous; but these expences were, of course, entirely suppressed; and the domestic claims of the butcher, baker, &c. were alone acknowledged. These amounted to a large sum; but Mrs. Charlton gave him immediately a draft upon her banker for an adequate supply, requiring only a sight of every receipt as the bills were paid. She was prompted to make this request from the fear that if the money was put into Philipson's hands without some check, he would employ it in a very different way from that she intended. But notwith-

standing Philipson's silence on the subject, she could not help suspecting that there were other demands which might yet be made, and again subject him to the horrors of duns and claims he could not answer.

In vain, however, were all her endeavours to come at the truth on this head. He avoided the subject as much as possible, and she feared to irritate him by pressing it.

In the most delicate manner she then turned the conversation on Isabella's health, and the attention and kindness requisite to effect its restoration. Philipson listened but coldly to a representation he could not deny, and endeavoured to fly from a topic he knew not how to discuss. Mrs. Charlton desisted, therefore, determined to pursue her own benevolent plan, and make his wife's comforts independent of him, as far as money could do it.

Philipson's heart, warped as it was, was not wholly callous, and he could not but feel a very deep sense of gratitude to Mrs.



Charlton. He attempted to express his sentiments; but she would not hear.

“ Only let me have the happiness of seeing you restored to a comfortable and respectable home,” said she. “ Let me have the satisfaction of knowing that I have contributed to restore you to domestic enjoyments, free from pecuniary embarrassments, and resolved to return to those habits of kindness and attention to your wife which were once so gratifying to her friends, and are absolutely essential to her health and peace. She is so entirely attached to you, that she is dependent on you, not only for the whole happiness of her life, but life itself. You are hardly aware of the real state of her health, for she exerts her utmost endeavours to conceal it from you; but I assure you she is very seriously and alarmingly ill; and only your return to your former tenderness, and your constant presence in your own family, can prevent her sinking to an early grave.”

“Your not having seen her lately makes you think her worse than she is,” said Philipson, rather coldly. “She is altered, I confess, but then she gives way to bad spirits, and neglects herself. Every thought and exertion seem to be directed to those brats, and how she shall most effectually spoil them. You saw yourself how that horrid little urchin behaved this morning. In fact, Mrs. Charlton, I acknowledge I bitterly regret having married as I did, and thus entailing on myself and a rising family all the evils of poverty. Arlingham’s shameful duplicity respecting the living of Fairfield has completed my disgust, and so totally given the shock to all my hopes of domestic comfort, that I cannot recover it. My temper is soured so completely, that I dread to be at home, for my mind preys wholly on itself, when not forcibly diverted from the real misery of my situation. I am sensible of my errors, yet I know not how to fly from them, for my home offers no attractions. If I were any thing but a clergyman, I could find

employment, and lose thought in occupation; but I have nothing to do, and cannot always be reading."

"To reply properly to such an argument," Mrs. Charlton answered, "would involve a much longer time and much more serious discourse than you would be willing to encounter. I am hurt and shocked at hearing such an assertion from a clergyman, the father of a family, and pastor of a village. Every situation in life has appropriate duties, and surely none more sacred, none more worthy of attention than yours. Twelve months ago you thought not as you now do; and what has thus changed you? were you not happier when, in the bosom of your family, you performed your domestic duties—when you met the eye of approbation from your parishioners as you walked through the village?"

"Yes, much happier, I own it. But, Mrs. Charlton, this is a subject I cannot, dare not enter upon. We have all our frailties, and I hope I am not worse than

others. If I am, I shall reform in time."

Philipson endeavoured to laugh off his evident confusion; and Mrs. Charlton, aware that this was not the time for such reasoning as she wished to have impressed on his mind, turned the conversation to his worldly affairs, and drew a plan which she hoped would make all parties more comfortable; and by restoring some of the enjoyments of which poverty had latterly deprived them, induce this selfish man to remain more with his own family, and in time wean him from those fatal friends who had made him so much more dissipated, without having made him really happier.

## CHAPTER IX.

~~~~~

Oh! 'tis excellent

To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous

To use it like a giant.

SHAKESPEARE.

A FEW days effected a very material change in every part of Philipson's house-

hold, except in its master's temper and manners. Tired to death of dull domestic habits, and a certain decency of conduct, which in Mrs. Charlton's presence he dared not dispense with, he anxiously anticipated the moment which allowed him to return to society so much more in unison with his taste, and began to think the "old girl," as he called her to Isabella, intended to stay there for ever. Isabella was shocked at such apparent ingratitude, and ventured to speak her sentiments.

"What you say is all very proper, Mrs. Philipson," said he, carelessly, "and quite right for you to say, who are so very materially benefited by her liberality."

"The benefit, I presume, is equal to us both," replied Isabella, "and ought to be equally felt and acknowledged. I'm sure, owing to her kindness, every thing in our family is now in a fair train of comfort, of which, I hope and trust, we shall equally partake."

Isabella's *hope* implied a *doubt*, and her eyes fixed upon her husband betrayed it.

Philipson understood her, and coloured as he answered—"Oh! as to that, I shall, of course, be here sometimes; but I do not intend to shut myself up in my study, and read divinity all day long, as that precise old damsel would advise. I'm much more likely to put off the black coat entirely, and mount a scarlet, as Molyneux advises me so often."

"You are not serious, Philipson? Good Heaven! you cannot for one moment think of such a cruel scheme," said Isabella, in real distress.

"I certainly do, however," he replied, coolly. "And Mrs. Charlton's paying these confounded bills is just the thing to promote my intentions. I have not, however, *settled* any thing, child, so I beg you will not weep so piteously, nor take the trouble to repeat this conversation either to Mrs. Charlton or your sister, for such a proceeding on your part would do more towards forwarding the plan than any thing; and I am by no means determined after all, nor certain that I can do it."

So saying, he departed whistling, and glad he had opened a subject, which had, in fact, been uppermost in his thoughts for some time. Isabella was too completely wretched to attempt to detain him, and too fearful of irritating him to ask him any questions. In spite of every endeavour to the contrary, her tears would continue to flow, till her countenance betrayed her feelings most evidently. She had, however, too much reason for unhappiness, to call forth any questions from her friends, which she might have found it very difficult to answer. Philipson looked at her with a scrutinizing eye, and sat down to dinner in a worse temper than usual. Mrs. Charlton endeavoured to introduce some topic of general conversation which might draw Philipson's attention from Isabella's swollen eyes, and sooth him into better humour. All her attempts, however, were vain; and Isabella's fresh cause of misery, from her late conversation with her husband, having occupied her time and thoughts more than any thing

else, she had not given so much attention to her dinner as she usually did when he was at home. She was soon sensible of her remissness in this important article, for Philipson's countenance became still more significantly dark.

"Mrs. Charlton," said he, "shall I try and help you to some of this boiled beef? You can eat it tolerably raw, I hope, or I'm sure you will stand a poor chance for a dinner. Raw meat! d——n it, how disgusting!"

"I am very sorry," said Mrs. Philipson. —"My love, I think if you cut it on this side, you will find it better done."

"Yes, and so peel the joint all round. Miss Vernon, can you venture upon a slice?"

"Oh yes, extremely well," replied Althea. "I have seen you too, Mr. Philipson, eat your meat less done than that, and declare you preferred it."

"Indeed!" said he, with an angry smile. "My taste in cookery I imagine then is

100 THE BALANCE OF COMFORT.

changed. Bella, have we nothing else coming?"

"Only a fowl and a pudding," she answered.

A silence of some minutes followed; but the continual shrugs and glances of Philipson at the unfortunate piece of beef were more irksome to the others than words would have been. The roast fowl at length made its appearance, and Isabella's eyes were turned fearfully from that to her husband, for she saw immediately it was dried up, and almost shrivelled. Again his brow assumed its deepest frown; and sticking his fork in the breast, he affected to shake it limb from limb. After making it look as bad as he could, he dissected it in silence, and sent a portion to Mrs. Charlton and Althea, who, receiving it as silently, eat it without comment. Isabella's heart was too full even to apologize; and she looked as if she dreaded the moment when he would have an opportunity of making himself amends for his present portentous silence.

The table was cleared quickly, and Mrs. Charlton hoped when the objects which had given offence were gone, their effects would vanish too; and Philipson's temper, enlivened by a glass of good wine, of which he still retained a small hoard for his own drinking, would resume something of a more complacent aspect. But she had yet to learn more disagreeable traits of him, and to discover that no offence could sink so deep, or be so long remembered, as a neglected dinner. He remained sullenly silent, or gave only an occasional sarcastic reply to all that was said to him—looked at Isabella with marked displeasure,—gave poor little Althea a tremendous push from his knee, and abused the baby—and unable longer to bear his own temper, and the consciousness of being an object of contempt to two, at least, of the party, he abruptly pushed back his chair, and without speaking to any one, took his way to the Lea, where his presence was hailed with tumultuous approbation by the men, and

dangerous fascination by the enchanting Mrs. Fermor. His temper entirely lost its asperity, and he became the gayest and pleasantest man in company ; and, as the wine added to his spirits and took from his prudence, he amused the party by quizzing "the old maid" he had left behind, forgetting, in his ridicule of her person and formal manners, that she had only that very morning paid for him considerably more than a hundred pounds, without a chance, or even a wish, for future payment. In his sober moments he recollected all this with some degree of compunction ; but he endeavoured to silence such a troublesome and intrusive monitor, by representing to himself, that such uncommon kindness on Mrs. Charlton's part was wholly for the sake of his wife and Althea, and that, but for them, *he* might have languished in a jail, unnoticed and unrelieved.

In the mean time, the party he had left at home little surmised where he was gone, and waited some time for him, in expectation of his joining the tea-table.

His non-appearance, however, at length gave the painful idea that he had returned to his old haunts at the Lea, and this suspicion was confirmed by a note to his wife, which arrived at ten o'clock, to say he staid all night, and that it was uncertain when he should be able to return home. The melancholy party separated for the night, unable to converse on common topics, and all equally desirous to shun the one which, nevertheless, occupied their thoughts.

The maid-servant, who occasionally waited on Mrs. Charlton of a night, entered her apartment to offer her services, and found Althea there also. Anxious to converse, they assured Molly they had no employment for her that evening; but Molly still seemed unwilling to depart. At last Mrs. Charlton civilly requested her to go; and then, Molly could not forbear speaking. "I'm sure," said she, "I don't wish to make no mischief; but 'tis a shame, after all you have done, ma'am, for master, that he should abuse you and

laugh at you, as he does at that good-for-nothing fellow's at the Lea. If you are an old maid, I'm sure you are worth a hundred such married creturs as that Mrs. Fermor."

Much more did Molly's eloquence betray before Mrs. Charlton could prevail on her to retire, and much more, she assured her, she could tell, if she would but give her leave. It was very evident from all that had been said, that Philipson was most unworthy of the kindness Mrs. Charlton had lavished on him; and Althea, well as she knew the exalted character of her friend, trembled lest, thoroughly disgusted with him, she should implicate Isabella in the feeling he naturally inspired. But Mrs. Charlton's was not a common mind nor a common character. She fancied she traced some such idea in the expressive features of Althea, and hastened to remove it.

"I am sorry," said she, "that Molly's regard for me should have induced her to repeat what must necessarily give

me a still more unfavourable opinion of Philipson. But though he is ungrateful, I will not be unjust. Knowing such to be his conduct, in respect to myself, I shall, of course, wish to quit his house as soon as I can, but not till I have placed every thing on such a footing as to secure future comforts to his wife. To give *him* a sum of money for this purpose would defeat my intention, for he would employ it very differently from my wishes—to vest it in Isabella's power, would, I think, be equally weak, since she, I am afraid, would be easily threatened, or wheedled into giving it up to him. To you, therefore, my dear Althea, I consign this draft, and I am assured *you* will use it according to my intentions, for your sister's comfort and advantage. When this is exhausted, do not hesitate to apply for more, or, if any fresh debts which make *her* uncomfortable should be discovered, let me know. I can no longer attempt to dissemble my opinion; and I see, but too clearly, that

your sister's health requires that attention, and that easiness of mind, which I fear she is not to experience. Philipson will never contribute to her happiness, and I dare not flatter myself or you that she will ever have a feeling independent of him, and consequently, that the chances are against her recovery. Should it, however, please Heaven to remove her, you must remember the evils, the sorrows, from which she will have escaped; and certain I am that *you* will have nothing to reproach yourself with, since all that tenderness and care *can* do, you *will* do."

The conversation ended here, for Althea was too miserable to continue it; and the tears which that night bedewed the pillow of the unhappy wife were not more bitter than those of the affectionate Althea.

CHAPTER X.

Let such teach others who themselves excel. FORT.

VERY soon after Althea's arrival at the vicarage, she had made a point of calling on her brother and his new wife, who still remained at Lark-Hall, Adderley, being not yet vacant. Mrs. Charlton accompanied her; but Philipson, who believed, with sufficient reason, that George Vernon had been a very principal mover of Arlingham's conduct in regard to the Fairfield living, had forbidden any intercourse on Isabella's part; and she had, therefore, not seen either George or his wife for many weeks. Althea found them just as insipid as usual—very fond, and exactly in the degree of quietude which minds like theirs would reckon happiness.

Mrs. George Vernon was in the family way; and the proper and improper for

her to do, or to eat, or to see, seemed to occupy the whole attention of the whole family. She was really very good-natured; and now that Althea and she no longer jostled each other in the grand race for a lover, she was very glad to see her, and very civil. No remarks were made on Isabella's not calling, the reason for her not doing so being well understood. Nor did George mention either her or her husband after the first inquiry concerning her health, which appeared a mere matter of course, from the little interest the reply inspired. George soon left the party, accompanied by Althea; and then Mrs. Pringle could not help speaking her sentiments of Philipson's conduct.

"'Tis shameful, Mrs. Charlton," said she; "'tis perfectly scandalous. He is a disgrace to his situation, and his church will soon be entirely deserted. I hear he is very much annoyed at the meeting-house being so much better filled than Feltham church; but can he wonder? I declare, if I was von of his parishioners, I

never could go to hear a man preach whose whole practice is a contradiction to his precepts. I'm sure my heart bleed for his wife, who is deserving of a better fate; and I cannot blame Mr. Arlingham for not giving Fairfield to such a man as Philipson."

"Nor should I so much, if religion had any share in Arlingham's conduct on that occasion," replied Mrs. Charlton; "but as I am afraid personal dislike, commencing when Philipson was not a profligate character, had the greatest share in actuating his decision, I am sorry he forfeited his word, and must blame him severely."

"But he did not actually promise to give Philipson the living," said Mrs. Pringle. "I heard Mr. Vernon say so."

"He implied so much, that Mrs. Vernon was induced by it principally to consent to her daughter's hasty marriage. I am afraid Mr. George Vernon has not shewn exactly the degree of brotherly regard in this instance one might have expected; but to gratify dislike towards

Philipson, forgot how much he implicated his sister in the consequences."

"Vell," replied Mrs. Pringle, somewhat angrily, "I cannot see how Mr. Vernon can be blamed. He has the prospect of a family of his own, and I must think is quite right to consider that first. I dare to say if a hundred pounds or so would be of any use to Mrs. Philipson, he would make no objection to advancing the sum; but I'm sure it would only be making ducks and drakes of his money to give it to her husband. I'll ask him to inquire a little into the matter, and desire him to send his sister what may be necessary."

"I beg you will not trouble yourself," said Mrs. Charlton, coldly. "The time is past, I hope, when Mr. Vernon's exertions, whether voluntary or otherwise, are required. Mrs. Philipson has nothing to fear now on the score of pecuniary troubles. Mr. Vernon may perhaps now satisfy his conscience, by his worldly sophistry, for the shameful neglect he has shewn towards his mother and two of his sisters;

but the time will come when even he will feel."

A loud burst of hysterical sobbing from Mrs. George Vernon checked the angry reply which the heightened colour of Mrs. Pringle's cheeks shewed she meditated. All was bustle and confusion. Water—drops—essences, all the applications used on such occasions, were heaped one on the other; and Mrs. Charlton saw she was an object of aversion to the enraged Mrs. Pringle, who angrily accused her of having frightened her sensitive Phoebe into hysterics, by abusing her amiable husband. It was evident that Phoebe did not intend to recover during Mrs. Charlton's stay, so she bade Mrs. Pringle a cool good-morning, and joined Althea at the door, whose indignant countenance proclaimed her equally dissatisfied as herself at George's behaviour.

"Nothing," said Althea, as they drove home, "can exceed his illiberality; and his mother-in-law encourages him in it. I believe his wife is too good-tempered,

silly as she is, to induce him by her persuasions to abandon his own family as he has done, though she is too indolent to urge a different conduct, and, like her mother, fancies every thought should be wholly fixed and confined to the expected heir of Adderley. I am afraid George and I have parted too much and mutually displeased to be ever again good friends. He affected to ridicule the distress he refused to relieve; and as he has neither wit or sense sufficient to bear him out in such an undertaking, he only degenerated into more disgusting ill-nature; and I left him in the midst of the ill-drawn picture of unhappiness, which he ought to be ashamed to suffer to exist."

"I am sorry on your own account you did not part more amicably," said Mrs. Charlton. "You are, or were, a favourite, and for you he might have done more than he seems inclined to do for any one else."

"I will never accept any thing from one so totally devoid of all proper feeling

owards my unfortunate sister," answered Althea; "nor so long as I have a pittance, however small, to call my own, or a friend like you, shall Isabella be indebted to him, even should shame prompt him to offer his services. No better motive would acquit him, I am certain."

"I think, my dear," returned Mrs. Charlton, "the best and kindest thing you can do, is to give Vavasour a legal right to assist you in reclaiming Philipson."

"How do you mean? how could he do that? He has, I know, church prebend in his gift; but I grieve to say Philipson is not the man to whom he would think himself authorised to give it, acting as he does in every thing from conscientious motives. Besides, if sir Montague Vavasour chose to assist Philipson, he could surely do it as well without my concurrence as with it."

"No, I think not. Philipson is a proud man naturally. Poverty and the neglect the world have increased that feeling, and he would, perhaps, consider as imper-

silly as she is, to induce him by her persuasions to abandon his own family as he has done, though she is too indolent to urge a different conduct, and, like her mother, fancies every thought should be wholly fixed and confined to the expected heir of Adderley. I am afraid George and I have parted too much and mutually displeased to be ever again good friends. He affected to ridicule the distress he refused to relieve; and as he has neither wit or sense sufficient to bear him out in such an undertaking, he only degenerated into more disgusting ill-nature; and I left him in the midst of the ill-drawn picture of unhappiness, which he ought to be ashamed to suffer to exist."

"I am sorry on your own account you did not part more amicably," said Mrs. Charlton. "You are, or were, a favourite, and for you he might have done more than he seems inclined to do for any one else."

"I will never accept any thing from one so totally devoid of all proper feeling

towards my unfortunate sister," answered Althea; "nor so long as I have a pittance, however small, to call my own, or a friend like you, shall Isabella be indebted to him, even should shame prompt him to offer his services. No better motive would actuate him, I am certain."

"I think, my dear," returned Mrs. Charlton, "the best and kindest thing you can do, is to give Vavasour a legal right to assist you in reclaiming Philipson."

"How do you mean? how could he do that? He has, I know, church preferment in his gift; but I grieve to say Philipson is not the man to whom he would think himself authorised to give it, acting as he does in every thing from conscientious motives. Besides, if sir Montague Vavasour chose to assist Philipson, he could surely do it as well without my concurrence as with it."

"No, I think not. Philipson is a proud man naturally. Poverty and the neglect of the world have increased that feeling, and he would, perhaps, consider as imper-

114 THE BALANCE OF COMFORT.

continent, and refuse from sir Montague Vavasour, that which he might deem the height of friendship, and accept from your husband. I am no greater advocate than yourself, or sir Montague can be, for putting men like Philipson into the church; and am convinced, that if the patrons of livings attended more to the morals and manners of those who are appointed by them, we should have fewer sectaries of all descriptions. I do not at present wish Vavasour to patronize your brother-in-law in this way; but I think he might serve him very materially, by admitting him occasionally to his house as a guest, or himself sometimes visiting at Feltham. Vavasour's rank and consequence, and still more his high character, would most effectually second the notice thus taken of Philipson; and by once more giving him some credit with himself, and drawing him from the society he now finds so pernicious (and which, under the odium now attached to him, is the only society which will countenance him), might restore the

love of virtuous and domestic habits, and in time render him worthy of the patronage I would *then* recommend him to bestow. A man of sir Montague's very splendid character possesses an influence far more extensively and intrinsically valuable than mere wealth can do. Whoever he suffers to associate with him must possess some merit, though obscured perhaps by error; and the man thus distinguished becomes anxious to deserve the distinction, unless too sadly lost for example to reclaim him; and thus good habits, though feigned at first, grow insensibly a part of himself. All this, were you now, or soon, to become lady Vavasour, might be effected; and Philipson, drawn from the contagion of evil company, once more acknowledge the beauty of virtue."

"Were any one talking to me except Mrs. Charlton," said Althea, smiling, "I should say that '*lady Vavasour*' was most judiciously introduced for effect."

"And if I was talking to any other than Althea Vernon, I should perhaps

have actually made use of just such an argument. As it is, though undesignedly, spoken, it ought not to be without effect, since even I allow it to possess considerable advantage, particularly as connected with the *prominent idea*."

"It is with me an argument of little force, however; but I must own that altogether you have certainly talked more to the purpose, than even Vavasour himself ever did, since I feel more inclined to adopt your plan than I have done when he has urged it. I must own, however, that I am surprised at the *warmth* with which, even in a case like this, *you* advocate matrimony."

"It is, perhaps, the only case in which I should do so," Mrs. Charlton replied, "for I do not know another instance where I have ever anticipated so fair a prospect of happiness. Good sense, good temper, fixed principles, and mutual confidence, added to the entire absence of all romance, are the attributes on both sides in the case in question, together with an elegant

sufficiency,' and the taste and spirit to enjoy and dispense it properly. I think you and Vavasour are fated to shew the world what wedded happiness really is; and that it is better secured by rational and steady principle, than by violent and romantic ardour."

"Heaven only knows!" said Althea. "Marriage is a state I have been taught to dread by precept and observation; and highly as I think of sir Montague, I dare not flatter myself with being an exception from so very general a rule. I believe, however, that a woman has a better chance with a man of his character, sentiments, and manners, than with many which appear much more brilliant and captivating: nor am I insensible to the advantages of situation. But after all, the idea of doing essential good to my dear Isabella is your stronghold of argument, and one which, I own, has made a very considerable impression."

"Then," said Mrs. Charlton, smiling, "the baronet's next letter will probably

meet with a kinder reception than *un*
I imagine, and obtain a kinder answer

"I think it just not improbable that
may," replied Althea.

CHAPTER XL

Beauty and worth in her alike contend
To charm the fancy and to fix the mind;
In her, my wife, my mistress, and my friend,
I taste the joys of sense and reason join'd.

HAM

SEVERAL days elapsed before Phil
thought proper to return home; and
it not been for the uneasiness his absence
evidently occasioned his wife, Mrs. C
ton and Althea would have wished for
continuance, since, when he did come
home, his temper and manners were
from contributing to the comfort of his
family. It was probably only because

was *Saturday*, and he had a sermon to prepare for the next day, that he did return, since nothing like affection, or the idea of receiving any degree of pleasure in his own house, seemed to have taken him there; dull, silent, and disconcerted, he only appeared there to throw a painful check over the spirits of others. Nothing like conversation or cheerfulness was heard when he was present, but every body seemed buried in unpleasant reverie. Even Mrs. Charlton's being there no longer induced him to exert himself, but, alike gloomy to all, he appeared to paralyze all their faculties by his own ill-humour and example, and then complained of the dullness he himself created, and made it an excuse for being so little at home.

On the Sunday he preached an excellent *selected* sermon, with a degree of outward sanctity which disgusted Mrs. Charlton, who recollected how entirely his conduct contradicted the doctrine he so eloquently held forth. It was seldom he took so much pains as he did when she was pre-

sent; for indignant at the absence of the more thinking part of his parishioners, who thought pretty much as she did on this subject, he did not consider the humbler part of his congregation much worth his exertions. Indeed, even of them the greater number had seceded from their regular church, and flocked to a neighbouring meeting-house, where the preacher preserved, at least, the appearance of following his own precepts. Philipson was not ignorant of the motives which prompted this conduct on their part; but ashamed to acknowledge his sentiments, he affected to be very angry, and wonder at the empty benches to which he preached.

A very few weeks, passed in the same way, served to convince Mrs. Charlton that he was incorrigible to all common representation of his conduct, and felt her last and only hope, and that a forlorn one, rested on Althea and sir Montague Vavasour. She thought it just possible that he might be soothed and won, by soft and flattering means, into a mode of behaviour which

should deserve the notice of the good and distinguished, by whom he now seemed abandoned, and thus saved from the last stage of vice, to which his present set of companions must inevitably drag him with themselves. Having strongly enforced this idea on Althea's mind, and put every thing on as comfortable a footing for the sisters as Philipson's reserve and pride would allow her to do, she quitted Feltham, leaving Althea very unwillingly, whose spirits quite sunk at the prospect before her, since she was too certainly convinced that all her efforts to restore domestic peace were vain. She had no hopes of reclaiming Philipson; and the physician whom Mrs. Charlton had called in had honestly confessed that he could not "minister to a mind diseased," and that Mrs. Philipson's health, and even existence, depended much more on a tranquil state of mind than on medical assistance.

Of her ever attaining such a state, the probabilities were so much against her,

that Althea ceased to hope, and anticipated nothing but sorrow. Such, in fact, was her extreme despondency, that Mrs. Charlton would still have prolonged her stay at Feltham for her sake, notwithstanding she had seen for some time that her presence there was quite unwished for by Philipson; but Mrs. Sedley had, a few days before, written in a style of pressing entreaty for her to go immediately to town, and mediate between her and her husband, whose conduct had at length completely overcome her long-tried patience, and worn out her lingering affection. Even for her children's sake, for whom she had borne so much, she could endure no longer, and a separation appeared inevitable, and almost equally desired by both parties. Mrs. Sedley had no friend to whom she could apply in such an exigency, except Mrs. Charlton, and she had too little reliance on her husband's justice or generosity to trust the arrangements necessary to be made in such a melancholy and important crisis to him only, without the interference of some friend on

her side. Under these circumstances, Althea could not request Mrs. Charlton's continuance at Feltham, where she alone could now reap any particular benefit from her presence, since every thing which could be done for Isabella was already settled. She therefore bade adieu with a very heavy heart to this inestimable friend, who seemed fated to be always suffering for the vices of others, herself almost wholly exempted even from errors.

Isabella, gratefully sensible of all she owed to her exertions, and scarcely believing she should live to see her again, took a most melancholy farewell, too much overpowered to utter those fervent expressions of respect and thankfulness of which her heart was so full.

Mrs. Charlton was sufficiently mistress of her feelings, warm and ardent as they were, not to betray them on this occasion. Her equal cheerfulness and soothing forebodings checked the sadness of Isabella's; and though she could not impose on Althea, she succeeded in comforting her sis-

ter, and relieving her oppressed spirits, at least for that time. She told Althea she should most probably see Vavasour, and that she would, now circumstances seemed more in his favour, and the accommodations at Feltham such as the sisters could be comfortable to offer him, take off the embargo which had been formerly laid on his appearance there, and send him over.

We mention but seldom this our real hero, because Althea having prohibited all scenes of courtship and romance, he would hardly make a very advantageous figure in the general opinion; for who would feel much interested for a lover so completely rational? But though rational, he was neither cold nor inattentive, as Althea's collection of elegant and sensible letters, continually received from him, could eloquently prove. He was not the kind of man to lose weeks and months in sighing at the side of his mistress, and lavishing those absurd attentions before marriage which only serve to mark the total absence of any after. Satisfied that he and Althea

perfectly understood each other, and that a woman of her character would not allow him to correspond with her, or otherwise encourage his attentions, unless she considered herself as under engagements of a sacred nature, he was contented to follow the useful occupations which a man of fortune and consequence may always find; embellish his estate for her whom he fully believed would eventually share it, and make all around him comfortable, by his attention to their wants. He respected the motives which had hitherto kept Althea from irrevocably engaging herself, and felt that when once decidedly accepted, it would be in the persuasion that their characters, after diligent investigation, assimilated, and that she believed herself capable of receiving and bestowing happiness. He had no idea of that encroaching passion, which, fixed wholly on one person, overwhelms every other affection, and renders the lover the only object in creation. He did not wish to be himself thus blindly selected from all the world, at the expence

of every natural tie, and felt that he loved Althea the better for her not suffering him to absorb every sentiment of love and esteem. All that he heard and saw of her heightened his affection, and added to the eagerness with which he anticipated the hour which would give him such a wife; and conscious that she would learn nothing of him that could lessen the esteem and regard for him which he was assured she possessed, he did look forward to the arrival of such a time with as much certainty as the fluctuation of human events allows. Her letters had of late assumed a tone of greater regard, and she had consulted with him confidentially on the subject of Philipson's conduct and Isabella's distress; to all which he had replied in such terms as convinced her he would most readily come forward to their mutual assistance, whenever his repeated offers of doing so should be accepted.

The time when such would be the case was now come. Althea had decidedly consented to become his wife, without far-

ther hesitation, nor had she concealed from him that the arguments of Mrs. Charlton, to whom she referred him, had given additional weight to his own influence over her heart. He immediately wrote to thank her for her compliance, and to fix the day on which he purposed being at Feltham, in order to arrange every thing for their marriage. His *letter*, though evidently written under the impression of perfect happiness, and expressive of the most ardent affection, was yet collected, rational, and free from high-flown or romantic language. Many girls would have thought it deficient in warmth; Isabella herself, though so fatally convinced of the emptiness of such mere sound, was not quite pleased with it; but Althea, satisfied with being beloved, esteemed, and respected, readily dispensed with being worshipped and adored, and felt her chance for happiness as great as if accompanied by all the commonplace attributes of angel, goddess, flames, and darts.

1

CHAPTER XII.

Who should be trusted now, when the right hand
Is perjur'd to the bosom? SHAKESPEARE.

ONE day only intervened before sir Montague Vavasour was expected at Feltham. Isabella sent to the Lea, where Philipson still was, to inform him of his purposed guest, to which no answer was returned, nor did he appear at home to order or assist in any preparations.

It was late in the evening preceding that on which the baronet was to arrive, that the sisters sat attentively listening to every noise, which they hoped was occasioned by Philipson's return, when suddenly they heard the little gate slap violently to; and before Isabella could express a hope that it was her husband, the sound of a horse galloping hastily up to

the door electrified them both, whilst the door-bell rang loudly.

"It cannot surely be sir Montague to-night?" said Althea. "I could not so mistake his letter."

"If it is, what are we to say in excuse for Philipson?" replied Isabella, fearfully.

The next moment a strange voice met their ears, eagerly and loudly inquiring if Mr. Philipson was at home, or where he was?

"Why where he most generally is," answered the servant; "at the Lea, to be sure."

"No, that he most certainly is not," replied the stranger, "for I am this instant almost come from the Lea myself, on purpose to find him. You have not seen him to-day then—have you?"

"No, I tell you, but we have been expecting him all day," returned the girl.

"All is as I suspected then," said the man, "and where to seek him I know not. Don't tell your mistress of this."

So saying, he rode off as hastily as he

had come up, leaving Althea, who, as well as her sister, had heard every word from the parlour-door, in an agony of distress. As to Isabella, the first inquiry had overpowered her, and she now laid on the sofa in a state of insensibility, from which Althea almost dreaded she should recover. What to fear she knew not; but that something terrible hung over her unhappy sister, she could not doubt. Late as it was, she could not resolve to remain in a state of such horrible suspense till morning; and leaving Isabella to the care of her maid for a few moments, she dispatched the girl for a young man who was accustomed to go for her to different places, and sent him immediately to the Lea for some elucidation of this dreadful mystery, with strict injunctions to repeat whatever he might learn to her only.

The man had no occasion to proceed so far as the Lea; for every creature he met told him the same fatal tale, that the "parson had run away with Mrs. Ferimor, Mr. Molyneux's kept-madam, and Mr. Moly-

neux and his friends had set off many different ways to find them." They added, moreover, that Mr. Molyneux was in such a terrible fury, that he swore he would shoot Philipson through the head without a word, whenever they came up with him.

The speedy return of her messenger was so entirely unexpected by Althea, that the precaution she intended to have taken of speaking to him in the kitchen, unsuspected by Isabella, was frustrated; and the maid, horror-struck by such tidings, evidently shewed in her frightened countenance, as she beckoned Althea from the parlour, that she had much misfortune to relate.

Isabella, who was hardly yet recovered, caught the expressive glance, and discerned the pale face of the girl; and tottering past her sister, insisted on knowing the whole truth. The awkward evasions of the man, and the ignorant entreaties of Hannah, that she would not ask for particulars, amounted to a strong confirmation of there being something to tell which was to over-

whelm her with horror; and the death of her husband, perhaps in a drunken quarrel, by the hand of some of his riotous associates, was the predominant idea. She asked if such were indeed the case, with a calm desperation which her rustic auditors mistook for composure; and believing she would not be so very much afflicted at an event which they did not think so bad as the evil she dreaded, they abruptly told the fatal truth, corroborating the cruel tale by the relation of every convincing proof they had collected. The effect was evidently decisive, though not instantaneous, and Althea viewed it as a death-stroke which would not long be delayed.

Isabella was conveyed, in a kind of stupor, to her bed, where, for the present, she remained apparently insensible to the greatness of her calamity. She neither spoke or shed a tear, and the convulsive snatching of her frame, and the heavy sighs she unconsciously and incessantly breathed, alone proclaimed that she yet survived.

Unable to doubt, yet wretched to be-

lieve so dreadful a report without farther confirmation, Althea sent off her messenger again, with orders to go directly to the Lea, and learn the exact truth from the persons yet remaining there. Alas! the information from thence only aggravated the former account, and doubt was no longer possible. Some hours had elapsed since the fugitives had eloped, though their flight had been so artfully managed as not to have been suspected for some time after it took place. Philipson had left no letter, no message, no clue by which his wretched wife could trace him. The only thing to be ascertained was, that he was gone, probably never more to return, and that hope itself was from that moment extinct in the heart of her he had so cruelly abandoned.

The night was passed by Isabella in the same horrid calmness, from which no efforts of the medical man whom Althea called in could rouse her. Indeed the return of sense must unavoidably bring with it feelings of so exquisitely-agonizing a nature,

that Althea dared scarcely pray for it. The idea of losing her was most dreadful, yet Althea was forced to own, that under such circumstances, death, in her present unconscious state, was the "consummation most devoutly to be wished," though *she* could not bring herself to desire it. She wrote immediately to Mrs. Charlton, who was, she knew, then in town, requesting her to break it to her mother, and, if possible, accompany her to Feltham. Two or three days must necessarily elapse before Mrs. Vernon could arrive, and Althea fancied that she *ought* to write and prevent Vavasour's coming, now that her sister's situation precluded *her* receiving him; but she felt herself so wretched, so forlorn, so deserted, though within a few miles of her own brother, that she could not prevail on herself to sacrifice the comfort of his advice and sympathy to a wretched punctilio, which, after all, might, and she tried to believe did, exist principally in her own ideas. Besides, her letter, though it might reach him on the road, could not now prevent his

having left home, and she therefore thought it better to leave matters as they were.

Towards evening Isabella's stupor began to give way to the applications of her medical attendant, and with returning consciousness came all that acute mental suffering which Althea had dreaded. Yet that she did feel misery almost too exquisite for endurance, was ascertained more by her countenance than by language.

Complaint in such a case could do nothing, and indeed the subject seemed too sacred and too terrible for discussion. Tears came not to her relief; and as sensibility acquired every moment added power, life seemed still more to recede, and she was believed by all around her to be in a state of extreme danger.

George Vernon, who had early learned the distressing tale, could not remain entirely unmoved by such a circumstance, and actually exerted himself so much as to go to Feltham, and offer to conduct his sisters to Adderley (where he had been settled only a few days), till something

could be arranged for Isabella, who would, he concluded, make no opposition to being legally separated from such a wretch as Philipson. Her situation, however, was such as to render a removal impossible, even had she wished it, which it is not very likely she would have done, knowing the little real sympathy she would meet with amongst people who hated Philipson, and were almost indifferent towards herself. George could not refrain from such animadversions upon the character of his brother-in-law, as, though but too just, were painful to Althea to hear; and they parted as coldly as they had met, Althea having the mortification of knowing that their situation was the topic of every tongue within many miles of them in every direction.

In the afternoon Althea began to be upon the watch for the only friend who seemed likely to bring her comfort. Every horseman who appeared along the distant road she hoped to discover was Vavasour, and every moment she passed out of her

sister's apartment was spent in watching at the window of her own. It was late in October, and the evening was cold and boisterous, and as dreary as her own feelings. At length she heard footsteps on the gravel-walk beneath her window, and immediately after the voice of her lover sounded sweetly in her ears. He spoke low, and she fancied sadly, and she became assured, from his accents, that he had nothing to learn respecting the late event. This was really the case.

As he drew nearer Feltham, he heard the disgraceful tale from a variety of persons, and in every varied form which exaggeration could give it. Under these circumstances, he thought it better to go as quietly as he could to the house; and therefore dismissing his servant with the horses when he came within half a mile of the vicarage, and ordering him to secure accommodations at the village inn, whither he intended himself to repair at night, he walked forward to the house of mourning, and gave to poor Althea, by his sympa-

thy and affection, the only comfort she could now receive. Her pallid looks and agitated spirits alarmed him on their first meeting, but his soothing attentions, his excellent advice, and his liberal offers of service and assistance to this unhappy family, at length succeeded in allaying the tumult of her mind, and she was able to enter into a regular recital of recent events. But their opportunities for conversation on this first evening of their meeting were continually interrupted; for Isabella, now every hour becoming more sensible of her calamitous situation, was easy only in Althea's presence, and was perpetually requiring her by her bedside. She was therefore obliged to allow sir Montague to depart early to his solitary inn, to which, though most unwillingly, she consigned him, at the suggestions of prudence, though every thing was provided for him at the vicarage, in the anticipation of a much happier meeting. She invited him, however, to breakfast with her the next morning; and they separated with increased

affection, and heightened admiration of each other's character.

Sir Montague took possession of his humble apartments at the White Lion, and Althea prepared for her melancholy vigils, though almost exhausted by having been up all the preceding night at the bedside of her suffering sister. A worthy old woman in the village had voluntarily offered to come and take charge of the children, so that no uneasiness remained on Althea's mind on their account.

CHAPTER XIII

~~~~~

Our mutual bond of faith and truth  
 No time can disengage;  
 Those blessings of our early youth  
 Shall cheer our latest age.

Those ills that wait on all below,  
 Shall ne'er be felt by me,  
 Or gently felt, and only so,  
 As being shar'd with thee. Cowp

THE following day was, if possible, more terrible to Althea than the former, for Isabella was in a more cruel state both of body and mind. The presence and sympathy of Vavasour alone kept Althea from sinking entirely under her distress and fatigue. Conversation was wholly interrupted, and Althea wandered from him to her sister, unable to remain with either, and counting the hours which must yet intervene ere her mother could arrive.

Thus passed the whole of that day, and

Althea, completely subdued, looked forward to a long and dreary night of watching and sorrow. Just, however, as Vavasour was preparing to leave her, a carriage drove quickly up, and Mrs. Vernon, accompanied by Mrs. Charlton, received the fainting girl in their arms. A few questions were asked and answered hastily; and Mrs. Vernon, understanding the excessive fatigue Althea had gone through, had her immediately put to bed, whilst, with an aching heart, she prepared to pass the night by Isabella's bed herself.

Sir Montague knew and appreciated the character of the excellent Mrs. Charlton, and felt infinite relief in leaving poor Althea to the consolation of such a friend.

A long conversation, late as it was, now took place between Mrs. Charlton and the baronet, in which every plan, most likely to promote the future comfort of Isabella, if she survived this shock, was discussed. Nothing, however, could be settled without Althea's concurrence, she being very materially connected with all.

The nature of their conversation, and the plan most at heart with them, may best be gathered from the subsequent discourse of the baronet and Althea, a few days after Mrs. Charlton's arrival, and when Isabella's health began, though very slowly, to mend.

"How can we ever sufficiently thank you, sir Montague," said Althea, "for all your late kindness and attention in our great distress?"

"I know but one way," he replied, "in which you can do it adequately. Mrs. Charlton, my dear Althea, before this sad affair took place, gave me the flattering hope that your heart was becoming favourable to the ardent wish of mine, and that you entertained an idea that my influence might be of good effect on the character, interest, and happiness of this family."

"That idea is, as you see, most fatally blasted," replied Althea, "and perhaps never might have been realized, had not this happened."

"Much as I allow of the influence of a virtuous man over one not *quite* depraved,

and I do not hesitate to believe myself the former, I own I never had the sanguine hope which Mrs. Charlton did me the honour to entertain so fully, of being of any effectual use, in a moral way, to Mr. Philipson. I formerly knew something of his character, and I fear it would not then have borne a very close investigation. He has proved himself, what I always expected he would be, vulnerable to every attack of folly and vice; and though, when I heard he had connected himself with your family, whom I esteemed from report, I thought he had a chance for improvement, I hardly believed he would continue the character I was convinced he must have assumed before he could have formed such a desirable connexion. Had not this fatal family, however, come down to the Lea, the good habits he had been *obliged* to practise might, perhaps, in time have become habitual. As it is, they are completely flown, and will return no more. The natural bias of his mind is restored; and conscious that he is lost to society,

and the good opinion of the virtuous, he will not resume a mask which would now be more troublesome than ever. But, my dear Miss Vernon, though perhaps to the hope of effectually serving your sister by reclaiming her husband, I owe one great motive for your consent to make me happy, I am not so humble as to believe it the only, or indeed the principal one. In promoting the happiness of others, you did not, I trust, intend to *sacrifice* your own, nor were you inattentive to mine. Tell me, Althea, was the interest of your sister your only care in consenting to become my wife?"

"Certainly not," replied she. "Much as I have seen of wedded infelicity, I have long thought a fairer lot the portion of that woman who married you. If I was doubtful, it was of myself; but I examined my own temper, and way of thinking—I saw where others failed—and I at length believed that I could make you happy, and be so myself. I think so still; and it is only because I feel that I have

no right to burthen you with my troubles that I hesitate. What is to become of Isabella and her children, I am at a loss to understand. The time my mother or Mrs. Charlton have a home, *they* will not want one; but it is not *merely* a shelter, and food, and raiment, that Isabella requires; she has always been accustomed to receive from me sympathy and assistance, and to me she yet clings, as if I were now her only stay."

"And may you still remain her comforter, her anchor of hope, my Althea! Only allow me to convince her you are not her only, though her best stay. Where can she be so well comforted, so well provided, so kindly attended, as in her sister's house? Where can her children be so ably taught, so judiciously corrected, as by that beloved sister on whom she leans for support? Your mother, good and amiable as she is, is not a proper companion, at this time, for your sister; for her spirits are weighed down, not only by Philipson's



conduct, but by her own imprudent compliance with the romantic wishes of two blind lovers, who themselves thought of nothing but the present hour, and whom experience ought to have taught her to restrain. Bitterly she reproaches herself for not having made that proper investigation of Philipson's affairs, which would have shewn her the real extent of the danger in which she placed her daughter's interest. She knew he had but a slender income, but she knew not that he had debts to a great amount. She required no provision for his family—she asked nothing of his former character—she consented, upon the gift of a very small living, and the *implied* promise of future preferment, to a scheme every way rash and imprudent. Nothing can excuse Arlingham, nor the manner in which he behaved on the occasion. It was highly offensive, both in its publicity and contempt, and effectually decided the balance, which, *perhaps*, then wavered between good and evil in Philipson's character. This now preys inces-

santly on your mother's mind, and she is much too gloomy a companion for your sister, who, though she naturally sickens at gaiety, requires cheerfulness. Then, as to the children, Mrs. Vernon would fancy it the height of cruelty to contradict them in any thing, and so they would be ruined; for *their* mother's thoughts, wholly engrossed by other matters, would give up all her maternal cares and authority to hers. To Mrs. Charlton's house the same objections could not so properly be made; but, after all, no home is so eligible, none so evidently proper, as yours, and it is equally evident that the sooner they find such an asylum the better."

"But why should I repay such generous affection as yours, by introducing, even at the commencement of our union, such distress as we *must* necessarily experience at present?"

"Should I feel less, think you, at knowing you were unhappy at a distance? Should I not rather find relief in soothing,

with a husband's tenderness, those sorrows which I should know you experienced, though I did not witness them? No, dearest Althea, though you must weep, weep on the affectionate breast of your husband, and let me share your cares, if I cannot remove them. Passion—a love like Philipson's might seek to fly from the participation of grief; but I think more highly of my sentiments for you, and I flatter myself you will not be surprised to find a friend in your husband. The comparative vicinity too of Charleville to Torrington and Westhaven, which, though not within a walk, are both within a morning ride, is certainly a pleasant thing, since, without entering into *society* exactly, which she would of course avoid, Mrs. Philipson would be able to enjoy the company of the select circle at Torrington occasionally, or vary the scene by a visit to Mrs. Arlingham—and there, by-the-bye, Althea, our presence every now and then may be useful, though not perhaps desirable. But *more* of that hereafter. I trust I have gi-

ven you unanswerable reasons why Charleville would be the most eligible home for your sister and her children—I will not say as long as she pleases, but as long as she lives; and there, I think, our united cares may restore her to health. If you see with my eyes in this business, you will not, from tenderness to Isabella, defer her entering upon a new scene of life, from which we both hope so much; and I hope you will not dismiss me from Feltham without naming the day on which I may return and claim my wife.”

Mrs. Vernon entered at that moment with a letter in her hand, and weeping bitterly—“ See,” said she, “ this dreadful, though not unexpected effect of Philipson’s conduct. His living is taken from him, and Arlingham has given it to Mr. Proby. This letter announces, though not in unkind or peremptory terms, Mr. Proby’s wish of placing his mother and sisters in the vicarage-house; and, in addition to her other troubles, Isabella has a home to seek.”

Sir Montague looked at Althea, and she understood the silent appeal. Under all these united circumstances, she consented to his and her mother's wishes, and in another fortnight she agreed to become lady Vavasour. This was the greatest alleviation Mrs. Vernon could find to her troubles; for, from such a union, she thought she might confidently expect happiness.

"Isabella," said she, "has indeed reason to bless you, for you give her an asylum, where she will yet remain with her dearest and greatest comfort—our dear Althea, and where she may, uninterrupted, pray for the conversion of her unworthy husband."

"Her prayers for him must be many," said sir Montague; "those for her children may be at once concise and comprehensive—Make them, oh God! to resemble Althea!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

~~~~~

————— I sum up half mankind,
And add two-thirds of the remaining half,
And find the total of their hopes and fears,
Dreams, empty dreams.

COWPER.

A MELANCHOLY and dreary sort of calm succeeded to the late agitating events at the vicarage. The worst that could happen was known, and each individual had nothing left but to submit to what nothing now could alter.

It was agreed that Mrs. Vernon should remain at Feltham, after the bridal party should leave it, in order to settle everything with Mr. Proby, who appeared very willing so far to accommodate Mrs. Philipson, as to take the furniture at a fair valuation for his mother, who would come as soon as it became vacant, at which time he was himself to be married to one of the

younger of sir Thomas Cotman's daughters. Lady Cotman had somewhat reluctantly consented to this match, and had laboured to impress Mr. Proby with a very high sense of the honour done him—an honour which nothing but the probable chance of having all her girls on her hands could have procured him. But Miss Jemima was the fifth daughter, and no lover appeared to come forward for her elder sisters; and her ladyship therefore thought it prudent to descend a few steps from the high altar of her ambition; and since men of rank and consequence would not marry her daughters, she found it expedient to give them to those who would. The four elder ladies affected great disdain of a country parson; but Jemima saw through the thin disguise, and despising them in turn, went quietly on in her preparations of wedding finery. Mr. Proby was indeed a man of so good a fortune, and prospects so flattering, that any one of the Miss Cotmans would have smiled very graciously on his addresses.

The peculiar circumstances under which Althea was to become a wife, took away all desire of much preparation. Isabella's unhappy situation damped the spirits of all parties, and would necessarily prevent the gaiety and bustle generally attendant on a wedding, in all ranks of life. Under any circumstances, Althea would have chosen a quiet and private celebration of such an event, for she at all times disliked parade and dash; and nothing now tempted her to depart from such an inclination. She and Mrs. Charlton, therefore, proceeded very placidly in their customary occupations, and gave, as before, the greater portion of their time and attention to Isabella. Miss Orford was to accompany sir Montague to Feltham, when he came to claim his wife, and this was the only addition expected to their usual party.

Unwilling to have the affair more widely spread and canvassed than was absolutely necessary, Althea determined not to acquaint her brother with her approaching

marriage fill within a day or two of its taking place. She then intended to request him to give her away, more in compliment to his relationship than to any great affection between them. She dreaded Mrs. Pringle's communicative tongue too much to put any thing in her power; and George's conduct had never been such as to give him any claim to her confidence, nor any right to feel angry that she withheld it as long as she thought proper.

These circumstances arranged between her and Mrs. Charlton, she turned her thoughts from her own immediate concerns as much as she could, and requested her friend to relate how she had settled matters between Mr. and Mrs. Sedley—an inquiry which other and more pressing events had hitherto prevented her making.

“It is but a discouraging relation, my dear,” Mrs. Charlton replied, “for a young woman on the verge of matrimony, particularly yourself, who, I can plainly perceive, yet cherish some of your former prejudices in favour of celibacy. However,

the fate of others ought not to influence you, where their conduct has so widely differed from what yours, I am persuaded, will be. I found Sedley and his wife as thoroughly wretched as two people could possibly be; and I was hardly surprised to find her as anxious for a separation as himself, particularly as he had willingly agreed to leave the children with her. He had not, however, conceded so material a point because she ardently desired it, but because he considered them as intruders, and as restraints upon his own time and attention, had they remained with him. Whatever might be the cause, she gladly retains them, though so slender is the allowance he has now the power of granting her with them, that nothing but the strongest maternal affection could have made her so anxiously wish it. His extravagance has reduced his once-large fortune to a mere pittance, and Mrs. Layton takes care to demand more than an equal share of what he yet possesses. Poor Matilda, in the midst of affluence even, has been long obliged to

practise severe economy, and she will, therefore, be able to make a trifle of consequence. His personal conduct has been such that she cannot feel regret at leaving him; and he has of late, by continually threatening her with a separation, inured her mind to dwell on the idea, till much of its horror has abated. As to him, he still appears to the world a gay, good-tempered, amiable rattle, unfortunately tied to a sour, morose, discontented woman, with whom no man could live happily—an idea which, without directly asserting to be correct, he contrives by shrugs and inuendoes to confirm. Mrs. Layton takes especial care to blazon the untruths he poorly affects to conceal; and Matilda is still so desirous that the father of her children should maintain some character in the world, that she is silent, though she cannot praise, and bears, patiently and quietly, that obloquy she has never deserved. I have made some little addition to her small income, and, as soon as I return to Torrington, shall look out for some comfortable cottage

near me, where I can still farther assist her. At present she and her children are in lodgings in London."

"And where is that specious wretch, her husband?" asked Althea.

"At present he too is in town, at his own house; but I find he has advertised the house and furniture for sale; and I dare say, if he can dispose of them, will go to Ireland. I know he has connexions here, and Matilda fancies Mrs. Layton will be his companion—an idea which, even now, is exquisitely painful to her."

"Would I could look round and see one instance of happy wedlock!" said Althea, very seriously. "Even now, situated as I am, I tremble at my own prospects, fair as they appear at present, and cannot help asking myself, why *I* should have the arrogance to expect a revolution, in what seem almost the laws of nature, in my favour?"

"Nay, do not libel nature," returned Mrs. Charlton, "but attack custom, education, and self-love."

“ Surely it is, it must be, the height of vanity and self-love in me to expect a different lot from the rest of the world in my matrimonial lottery,” said Althea. “ Why should I, under the vain idea of being happier than others, tempt uncertain fate, when I am so happy, as far as I am myself concerned, in my present situation?”

“ Because,” replied her friend, “ you see things as they really are, not as you wish them to be. You reflect before you decide, and therefore decide with prudence. I am not an advocate for matrimony—that you know; but I do think that if any woman ever might expect to be a happy votary of Hymen, you may. You must, without any vanity, be conscious of the very high opinion I have of you, and may therefore conclude that I do not think very ill of sir Montague Vavasour, when I pronounce him worthy of you. Congeniality of temper, sentiment, and character, constitutes the great essential of wedded life—a competency is a subordinate, but by no means a slight considera-

tion. All these absolutely-necessary concomitants you will possess in a union with Vavasour, and I therefore look forward with even more than hope—with confidence—to your happiness together. An old woman may talk for ever to the generality of young ones, and never convince them that forethought and prudence would prevent many wretched matches, prudence appears so contemptible, when opposed to passion, which is so often mis-called love; and young people marry first and reflect afterwards—a fatal and irretrievable error.”

“ Well,” answered Althea, attempting to rally, “ no one, not even yourself, can accuse me of want of reflection on this most important step of my whole life; for I have actually thought till I am almost incapable of adding another idea to the subject. I shall marry at least with an adequate opinion of all the *difficulties* attending the state—with a due diffidence of myself, a most ardent wish to make my husband and myself happy, and a

firm determination to perform every duty annexed to the situation, however such performance may be rewarded by him who claims it. If I am to be miserable, I will not deserve to be so."

"With such sentiments and such power of acting up to them, I do not fear for you," replied Mrs. Charlton, "nor do I doubt but the Balance of Comfort will, this time, be in favour of matrimony."

CHAPTER XV.

~~~~~

Plucking up my love, they have well nigh  
Pluck'd my life too, for they were twin'd together.

YOUNG'S *Revenge*.

It was not without considerable difficulty that Isabella was at length persuaded to leave the neighbourhood of Feltham without having heard some tidings of Philipson, either from himself or others; but the arguments of her friends, and Mrs. Ver-

non's promise of remaining near the spot till something had been heard of him, at last prevailed; and, though very reluctantly, she prepared to abandon the favourite abode she had so lately, and so happily, assisted to ornament and improve, with every hope and thought awake to felicity. The reverse was so dreadful, that she endeavoured to forget it as much as possible by the indulgence of opiates, which, when alone, she took in large quantities, thus obtaining a temporary and fatal oblivion to sorrows, which, however, returning feeling only rendered still keener, at the same time that her health suffered from the dangerous habit, which she indulged unsuspected by her friends. It was very evident that she would never recover from the terrible shock she had received, though nature might yet linger and suffer for some time. Isabella's was by no means a strong mind, nor one at all calculated to struggle against misfortune. She made no efforts to conquer her feelings; but conscious that she should leave her chil-



dren in the best hands, in committing them to Althea, she wished only to die, and resigned herself to misery unresistingly.

George Vernon, who, if he had not much regard for his family, had some for appearances, had heard indirectly some strictures on his conduct towards his sisters, which convinced him that his neglect had been more observed and commented on than he had thought possible; and he had, in consequence, attempted to pay more attention to Isabella in her present situation than he would otherwise have thought necessary. His advances, however, had been very coldly received, and he had affected to be both hurt and angry at it. He at last said so much, that when Mrs. Vernon, at Althea's desire, informed him of the approaching marriage, and the plan of removal which would take place immediately, she accepted for herself the invitation he extended to Isabella also, if she wished to remain longer in the vicinity of Feltham. Mrs. Vernon was anxious to get her daughter away, and therefore did not

mention George's invitation, but agreed to go herself to Adderley when the rest set off to Charleville—a determination with which he was full as well satisfied as if the whole party had been going to him. Mrs. George Vernon cared nothing about the matter, and was indeed too entirely insignificant to the family, to be ever much thought of by any of them.

Nothing material intervened from this time till that on which sir Montague Vavasour and Miss Orford arrived at Feltham. Settlements of every description had been left wholly to the baronet, to whose liberality Althea knew she might confidently trust, and to which no objection could be made but that he had been too munificent.

Mr. Proby performed the ceremony in Feltham church; and Althea, not quite without wonder, heard herself congratulated as a bride.

She and sir Montague immediately set off in a new travelling chariot to Charleville, leaving the rest of the party to fol-

low as soon as Isabella could prevail on herself to appear for that purpose. Mrs. Charlton's carriage and a postchaise conveyed them to Charleville; and Mrs. Vernon, in a most melancholy frame of mind, which the sight of Isabella's natural distress at quitting Feltham greatly increased, returned to Adderley with her son, who had condescended to give Althea to sir Montague.

The party reached Charleville to a late dinner, undistinguished by any of the parade, which, under other circumstances, would probably have given information of a wedding at every place where they changed horses. Indeed, situated as Isabella was, gaiety was out of the question; and sir Montague, satisfied with the conviction of happiness in having secured the only woman he believed formed to produce it to him, was content to enjoy it rationally, and willingly substituted quiet for dash and bustle—a disposition perfectly in unison with the retiring feelings of Althea.

Upon their arrival at Charleville, Isabella immediately took possession of the apartments appropriated to her sole use, and in the accommodation of which, sir Montague had been indefatigably employed ever since he had last parted from her. Charleville was a large and magnificent old mansion; and Isabella found herself as much and as distinctly *at home* there, as if she had actually inhabited a different house, with all the advantages of immediate society, when she chose to enjoy it, without the fatigue or trouble of seeking for it. Happiness, under her present circumstances, was not expected; but comfort, at least, of every external kind, was largely secured to her in this arrangement. She could have no care, either present or to come, for her children, for they were under Althea's superintendence; whilst every attention to herself was amply supplied by the personal kindness of Mrs. Amy Finch, who had accepted an invitation from Vavasour to reside principally at Charleville, for the

express purpose of watching over the fast-declining health of this unfortunate young woman, at least till Mrs. Vernon could herself make it convenient to do so. Many circumstances made such attendance inconvenient to Mrs. Charlton, whose own affairs required her personal exertions, and towards whom Mrs. Sedley also looked almost wholly for succour and protection.

It was not to be expected that lady Vavasour could now give her undivided attention to her sister. Her new situation brought with it new duties, and which, though sir Montague was ready to wave very considerably, she was sedulous to observe. Their rank in life demanded some sacrifices to the world, and on her husband's account Althea was earnest to make them.

Visits were accordingly received and returned; and Althea found that when Isabella's improved health and spirits (for of her death she could not bear to think) allowed her to cultivate intimacy with some

of the neighbouring families, she had the promise of some very agreeable and desirable associates, both for her husband and herself. She was much amused by several letters of congratulation from her old acquaintance round Adderley, who ill concealed the envy and malice of their real sentiments under the mask of pleasure at her fortunate marriage, which many affected to have foreseen, and all declared they were convinced was only what she deserved. The most violently friendly was from lady Cotman, who was perhaps in her heart the most mortified at it. Mrs. Arlingham wrote to promise a speedy visit at Charleville, and her letter gave an unpleasant picture of the state of her own feelings, which, without a positive assertion to that purport, were evidently in their usual state of passionate ferment, or sullen resentment. Lord and lady Randolph also wrote, with all the stately and frigid decorum which habit in him, and nature in her, pronounced proper on the occasion. Harriet seemed to think that

Althea had at last come round to her opinions, respecting grandeur and riches being necessary to happiness, and congratulated her in a way that plainly evinced *she* thought Vavasour himself only a very secondary object in the business. She promised a future visit to Charleville, which her situation at present prevented her paying; and gave to *lady* Vavasour a much warmer invitation to Randolph Castle (if indeed warmth could be in any way applied to Harriet) than would have been extended to Althea Vernon. Very little mention was made of Isabella, and that little not sufficiently soothing to meet her eyes.

It is however probable, that had she seen it, she was too much abstracted from every thing but her own situation, to have been much hurt by the coldness and inattention of a sister, whom, from the circumstance of their early separation, and total dissimilarity of character, she had hardly ever considered as one so dearly connected. It was very evident to every body about

her, that she was becoming daily weaker, and that she gave herself more and more up to sorrow, without an effort to combat its pernicious influence. Naturally romantic, and of an understanding far from strong, she had cherished certain ideas of happiness, particularly in married life, to which she pertinaciously adhered; and having been disappointed in all which could constitute felicity, she looked with contempt on mere comfort, and would have despised herself, could she have been satisfied with a medium. When she first settled at Charleville, she fancied she could not exist out of her children's presence; and Althea beheld with alarm the ruinous system of indulgence which threatened to render all *her* endeavours towards their improvement, at least that of the little girl, nugatory. She saw that any contradiction threw her niece into fits of rage, and that a furious stamp of her tiny foot, or a violent scream, instead of being punished by a steady denial of what she wanted, im-



mediately gained her end. Edward too, young as he was, began to find his advantage in passion and crying; and Althea trembled, lest in introducing such troubles into the hitherto-calm abode of Charleville, she might disgust sir Montague with the home she hoped to endear. But in this she mistook his character. He was aware of all he might expect when he pressed her to become his wife, and he saw that she did all in her power to keep every thing unpleasant from his participation.

A few weeks removed much of the evil she dreaded for the children; for Isabella, now wholly at leisure to grieve, retired every day still more into herself; and relieved from the necessity of contriving to-day for the exigencies of to-morrow, she gave herself wholly up to sorrow. When her children now remained with her, she wept over them with a passionate fondness, which frightened and irritated them, and they at last became unwilling to go much into her dressing-room; and she became at length contented to see them

only for a short time, and at stated intervals, every day.

Lady Vavasour soon found the advantages of this arrangement, and the young Althea improved rapidly. She almost dreaded Mrs. Vernon's arrival, who was, under any circumstances, but too apt to humour the children most injudiciously, and, in their peculiar situation, considered it the extreme of unkindness to contradict them in any thing. But Althea determined to be firm, and not to cede her authority even to her mother. Mrs. Vernon was now every day expected, for the elder Mrs. Proby was settled at Feltham, and every transaction of business was concluded between them. George Vernon was civil; but the coldness of his heart never led him to be more; whilst the folly and extreme insipidity of his wife, good-tempered as she was, made Adderley a very irksome residence to his mother.

CHAPTER XVI.  
~~~~~

“ Women, once anxious to please, have the happy art of finding out the way; and how ungrateful must his nature be, who is not won by tender and refined attentions !”

ALTHEA, in a very few weeks, found herself completely *at home*, and much more *settled* than she had been ever since the marriage of her sisters. Determined to form a foundation for wedded happiness, she made the study of her husband's temper her great object, that by conforming her own to it she might know where to avoid giving offence, or incurring even the shadow of dispute. She had been accustomed to study characters and tempers, and her own amongst others, and she felt herself equal to any sacrifice of her own wishes and habits, whilst she was repaid by kindness, and the pleasure of seeing

others happy by such sacrifice. She soon found that Vavasour's temper, though generous, open, and good, was somewhat hasty, and impatient of contradiction.

Peculiar circumstances had made him his own master at a very early age, and accustomed, in consequence, to please himself, he had contracted some habits and some opinions not exactly in common with the rest of the world. But if he required some humouring from others, he was gratefully sensible of any sacrifice made to please him, and returned tenfold every kindness he received. To *manage* him was to give him his own way; but a temper less steady and sweet than Althea's, would perhaps have forfeited this power by exacting too much, and conforming too little, particularly at first, when ladies are apt to expect that, as brides at least, their reign ought to be absolute. Much more is lost or gained of future happiness and influence by a wife's behaviour in the first months of her marriage than is generally imagined. A man

will not be so great a bear as to contradict a blooming bride; but he, even in those hours of novel fondness, inwardly meditates on those future opportunities of making reprisals, which shall pay him for his present complaisance.

Althea began her career as she determined to continue it. Her spirit was firm where she knew herself in the right—her understanding strong and perspicacious—her temper invariably sweet, but not *weakly* complying with every contradictory whim in others. She was not tenacious about trifles, nor did she exact the attentions which she was nevertheless gratified at receiving. Domestic order and regularity she insisted on as essential to domestic comfort; but any change of hours which her husband found convenient, she *made* agreeable to herself. Every thing, however trivial, which he fancied contributed to his comfort, became an object of consequence and interest to her. She gave the greatest attention to any anecdote which he related of circumstances which

had pleased or interested him—concurred in all his plans of liberal charity, and saw herself that such plans were executed as he wished. Though not accomplished, in the regular acceptation of the word, she was well-informed in every species of general knowledge—conversed well and fluently—did the honours of her table with the ease and elegance of a well-bred woman—and by her manners, expressions, and appearance, convinced even her most high-bred neighbours, that she was a polished, if not a fashionable woman—one that reflected credit on her husband's choice, and evidently gloried in her own.

Sir Montague Vavasour was congratulated on his fortunate selection of a wife, and every day still more convinced him of the justice of such congratulations.

Miss Orford remained with lady Vavasour till Mrs. Charlton was again settled at Torrington, where she went, as she had long promised, to cheer her solitude. An event, however, happened before her change of abode, which made her visit to

Torrington a short one, and gave her the power of fixing in an elegant establishment of her own, near lady Vavasour. This was the sudden death of Mr. Patrick Orford, by a fall from his horse; and by this accident she became mistress of a second ample fortune, which, though not equal to the one she had so nobly resigned, was more than adequate to her wants and wishes, determined, as she said she was, never to marry, unless she could find another Vavasour, of which however she despaired.

“And well you may,” said Althea, to whom she was talking.

“And yet,” added Miss Orford, “Vavasour is not so good a temper as I once fancied him.”

“Vavasour not good-tempered!” exclaimed Althea, with a look of great surprise, and half angry. “Good Heaven! where will you find such another? I’m sure I have never seen him otherwise.”

“I should wonder if you did,” returned Miss Orford, with mock gravity, “whilst

you indulge him as you do in all his whims and fancies."

"What whims? he has none to indulge, that I can see," Althea replied.

"No! Pray what do you call his choosing to have old Carlo, that great rough pointer, an ugly beast, always stretched on the rug, even in the drawing-room; and then his dressing-gown, and yellow slippers, without which, he would fancy he could not eat his breakfast; and his whim of preferring a tea-kettle to an urn, under the absurd notion of its making the tea better? Don't you call these whims?"

"No," said Althea; "and if I did, I should still choose to comply with them. Pray, in what has he ever thwarted me? I hope never to see the day when I shall think there is any merit in complying with the habits, or even prejudices, which custom has made pleasant to my husband."

"I'm glad you can be angry, my dear,"

said Miss Orford, laughing, "for it brings you rather more to a level with us mere mortal tempers; and now to sooth your indignant spirit, I will, if you like, join you in sounding your husband's praises a whole hour, 'by the Shrewsbury clock;' for after all, I don't know any one like him; though I can assure you, much as you admire him, he is thought a very awful personage by others."

"What! with that sweet, conciliating smile?"

"Every body don't understand smiles, I suppose," returned Miss Orford. "I heard that same sweet, conciliating smile degraded to a very different expression the other day I met Mrs. Raymond at Mrs. Hopetoun's the morning I called there—that beautiful automaton, who seems only born to be looked at—she was speaking of you when I entered, and she reckoned you a good pretty sort of body, *considering*; but as to sir Montague, she said she really felt afraid to look at him. 'What do you think, Mrs. Hopetoun!' she con-

tinued; 'sir Montague and lady Vavasour dined with me last week; and do you know when I sat down to table, I just recollected that I had no cheese in the house, and that the bottled porter was still in the cold cellar. Raymond should have thought of that; but he had been out all the morning. I felt so red all dinner-time, that I never once thought to look at any body's plate, or offer the fish or any thing. I really felt quite awed every time I looked at sir Montague, and quite dreaded to mention the cheese; so I sat quite silent, and eat more dinner than I wanted, just because I did not know what to do. And I saw him smile at lady Vavasour two or three times, so satirical-like. Really my face burnt so; for I think there is something very awful and overpowering in a title—don't you?' Mrs. Hopetoun laughed; but she defended Montague's smile as well as she could from such a foul aspersion. Mrs. Raymond, however, insisted upon its being

quite like a sneer, and that you are both very awful sort of folks."

"I hope then," replied Althea, "she will be provided with cheese, and take care her bottled porter is drinkable, next time she has such awful people to dine there. I can only say, she requires all her beauty to make the awkwardness of her manners tolerated. Fortunately for Montague, the opinion of Mrs. Raymond is not much regarded."

"Piqued, I vow!" said Miss Orford. "You began to feel the tender passion comparatively late in life, but you seem determined to make up for lost time. However, I so perfectly agree with you, that as long as Montague is the theme of your praise, I will willingly join you."

Certainly it was impossible to live with the baronet without loving him; and Althea's heart was perhaps more susceptible of real affection, from loving, as Miss Orford said, comparatively late in life. Her feelings had not been refined away by

fancying herself continually attached, and the perfect esteem she felt for her husband added strength to every warmer sentiment.

Happiness for once seemed, even to Althea, to be on the side of Hymen; and could she have seen Isabella well and restored to peace, she would have acknowledged her own to be complete. The recollection of Isabella, however, brought with it many a pang; for it could not fail sometimes to produce a doubt, as affording an instance of the instability of human felicity. Althea acknowledged the superiority of her husband, but she was too humble to appreciate herself as she deserved.

CHAPTER XVII.

youthful

'Tis education forms the common mind;
Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclin'd. POPE.

AT length Mrs. Vernon arrived at Charleville, and was at once struck with the great alteration for the worse in Isabella's appearance. She had intended to take some small house immediately in the vicinity of Charleville, and thus relieve sir Montague from his dying guest, without removing her from occasionally seeing Althea, which, with her present want of interest in every object near her, she found was all her daughter wished. But her situation was now so precarious, and her weakness so much increased, that, had Mrs. Vernon still wished it, or the Vava-sours inclined to suffer it, it would have been found impossible to remove her *without hazard*. Mrs. Vernon therefore

took her station in the invalid's apartments, and shared with Mrs. Amy Finch the fatigues and cares of nursing; for that kind and warm-hearted friend steadily refused to relinquish her post entirely, though she now consented occasionally to vary the scene.

Mrs. Vernon concealed from Isabella what she owned to 'Althea, that she had heard of, though not *from* Philipson; but as she had no pleasant communication to make, she would not acknowledge to his wife, when questioned on the subject, that she had heard any thing.

An acquaintance of Mrs. Pringle's called there when Mrs. Vernon was making her farewell visit at Lark-Hall, and without understanding who she was, began to speak of Philipson. This gentleman had just come from Ireland, and had seen Philipson there. When he first mentioned him, Mrs. Pringle looked at Mrs. Vernon, who gave her a hint to be silent; for she wished to learn the truth, though she could hard-

ly expect to hear any thing satisfactory. From this Mr. Smith she learned that Philipson and Molyneux were *together*.

"Together!" exclaimed Mrs. Pringle. "What, after Philipson stole his mistress, and vent off with her in that way! Surprising!"

"Yes," replied Mr. Smith, "odd enough, I grant you, and true also. Molyneux, it seems, left home in a perfect Irish rage, determined to kill or be killed; but the wind was adverse when he got to Holyhead, and the packets could not sail. It answered no purpose for Molyneux to scold and swear; and as several other persons were in the same predicament at the same place, he thought it better to attempt to make some pleasant acquaintance, and cheat 'the lagging hours' by gaming and drinking—a measure he found by no means disagreeable to one or two *gentlemen* in the party.

"Two or three days passed thus, and a lady, who had early attracted Molyneux's

observation, became in that time the object of his regard, and with little persuasion agreed to accompany him to Ireland, where, though no longer hostile towards Philipson, to whom he now avowed himself much obliged for having taken off his hands an object of whom he was really long since tired, he still meant to go. Philipson was agreeably surprised at an event so unexpected; and as Molyneux liked his company, and he liked his table and resources, they formed a new compact of *friendship*, and are now living in great style in Dublin. I understand Philipson declares he has for ever abjured England, and shall never return to his family; but that when Molyneux has finally dissipated the now-small remains of his once-noble fortune, they are to go together into the army, and stand the fortune of war."

Such was the account Mrs. Vernon gave Althea, and which they concluded was better kept from Isabella, whose feelings, even on that most tender subject, seemed gradually becoming less acute, and her recol-

lections of the past less vivid. A few weeks, it was evident, would give her the rest of the grave; and could Philipson now have been restored to her, neither her health or mental faculties could have been sufficiently restored to have rendered his return a blessing.

It was impossible that Mrs. Vernon should not see the great improvement in the temper and behaviour of the young Althea, and she warmly praised lady Vavasour's management, though she found it a very hard task to follow her example, which she sometimes thought too rigid. But with respect to the boy, she really thought it quite cruel, and totally condemned it—"Such a baby!" said she, "how can you, Althea, hear him cry so, and not give him what he wants? He cannot know better, poor thing!"

"A fatal idea that of yours, ma'am," replied Althea, "and one which you must forgive me if I do not adopt. Experience, even in the short time I have had the management of Edward, proves my plan a

good one. He cries much less now for nothing at all than when he came here, and I am persuaded will soon know that what he does cry for he never will obtain. I have the sad prospect of being the only mother these dear babes will have, and I intend to endeavour at making them good and happy. I should pursue precisely the same plan if I ever have children of my own; and I must beg, my dear mother, that you will not, by well-meant, but injudicious fondness, interfere in my rules, and frustrate my intentions."

Mrs. Vernon was not quite pleased, and tried repeatedly to persuade the nurse to humour the passionate fits of Edward, and give him what he cried for. But nurse was not a girl, and found the comfort, to herself, of her mistress's plan, and therefore ventured to disobey. Mrs. Vernon at length desisted from requiring it, though she still thought Althea unkind. She once tried to interest sir Montague in behalf of the screaming little tyrants, but he

soon gave her to understand how little she had to hope from his interference.

"My dear madam," said he, "I dare say Althea is very rigorous, and sufficiently barbarous, to these poor children; but really I find her method of proceeding with them so productive of peace to the house, and happiness to themselves, that I cannot have courage to attempt a change in her measures. I can only say that her treatment of these infants is one more proof of the excellence of her heart and judgment; and that should I be so happy as to become a father, I shall, with perfect confidence, commit my children entirely to her management, in the full persuasion that so brought up, they must be comforts to us, and to themselves."

This encomium on Althea reconciled Mrs. Vernon to the difference of opinion held by the baronet and herself, though she still thought it rather too rigorous a measure to begin to contradict the poor things before they could possibly know why they

were thwarted. But as the children would most probably live in future entirely with her daughter Althea, she could not help owning that those who were to have the care of them were at liberty to pursue that plan which promised most happiness, in their idea, to all parties.

A few days after Mrs. Vernon's arrival at Charleville, a very important express came from Randolph Castle, announcing two events of great moment—the death of the earl's two aunts a few days after the birth of an heir.

The death of the old ladies, who appeared to have expired nearly at the same time, was a matter of perfect indifference to all at Charleville, except indeed they might be rather glad that Harriet was thus relieved from two very rigid censors. They died at the castle, in the very midst of the rejoicings for the birth of the heir, which last event was indeed a subject of general congratulation, since it gave to the countess the first wish of her heart, and the only one which had ever appeared of im-

portance to her. It increased her own consequence and dignity, made the earl really happy, and secured to herself a very capital increase of fortune and power, whenever the anticipated moment of *widowhood* should *reward* her endurance of the present. The earl had himself condescended to announce the joyful event, forgetting, in the birth of a son, so ardently desired, the death of two old aunts, who had *bequeathed every thing to him and his children*.

The situation of Mrs. Philipson forbade Mrs. Vernon's wish of going herself to Randolph Castle to see this child of wonderful promise, and prevent its being killed with kindness—a circumstance she thought by no means improbable, if lady Lucretia, the earl's sister, chose to take the management of the nursery into her own hands—a measure which Harriet dared not dispute. It was, however, impossible to leave Isabella, whose existence drew every day perceptibly nearer its close. Sir Montague, indeed, pointed out the vast accumula-

tion of snow in every direction, even round the vicinity of Westhaven, and asked her what she thought of the *north* road? Mrs. Vernon fancied that was an obstacle which perseverance could have overcome, particularly as in February, she contended, it might be expected soon to give way. But unable to go and watch in person over the young lord, she was forced to content herself with long letters of nursery advice, which, as she much feared, lady Lucretia's influence rendered of no avail. The old lady, as Mrs. Vernon had fearfully anticipated, took her station almost continually in the nursery, from whence she endeavoured to exclude every particle of fresh air, because it was very cold, and would fain have passed her whole time in feeding the child, which, she fancied, could only cry from cold or hunger. Fortunately for Harriet, she was but a secondary object of the old lady's consideration, and, as far as her own management was concerned, she was as obstinate as lady Lucretia, and chose to be guided by the more sensible opinions

of modern times, by which she probably escaped a fever.

Lady Lucretia shrugged her flat shoulders and frowned, but said nothing more when she found Harriet so determined.

The man who, with much difficulty, on account of the roads, had brought this important express, said the earl himself was certainly breaking very fast, and that everybody remarked he was very much altered; but that the young lord, whom he had been *allowed* to look at, on purpose that he might be able to satisfy curiosity, was a very fine young gentleman, and had a power of names.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Il y a un lieu sur la terre où les joies pures sont inconnues, d'où la politesse est exilée, et fait place à l'égoïsme, à la contradiction, aux injures à demi-voilées; le remords et l'inquiétude, series infatigables, y tourmentent les habitants. Ce lieu est la maison de deux époux qui ne peuvent ni s'estimer, ni s'aimer.

ST. LAMBERT.

It may not be amiss now to leave the family at Charleville, and make some inquiries into the state of affairs at Arlingham, from which place we have been long absent. Several different times had been named for Mr. and Mrs. Arlingham to visit Charleville, but something had perpetually occurred to prevent it.

Elizabeth was certainly not exactly the cold and callous character which Harriet was, but she was not particularly distinguished by warmth, and perhaps did not anticipate much pleasure at Charleville, the

time Isabella was there in such a melancholy state. There was, however, another reason which, in one or two instances, had influenced her refusal to accept Althea's invitation. Once only she had seemed willing to go, and then *Mr. Germaine* was in London, and it was *not convenient* to her husband—two motives almost equally powerful in urging her to go. Whether *Arlingham* would have made his business subservient to her wishes was never proved, for a deep snow fell before he had determined, and ended the debate; and nothing more was proposed on the subject till the month of February, when, as was usually the case with this connubial pair, caprice dictated in *Mr. Arlingham* the desire to go.

A silent breakfast had nearly ended, which *Mr. Arlingham* employed over a newspaper, and *Elizabeth* over a novel, which occupations, by-the-bye, probably prevented, six mornings out of the seven, a less querulous way of passing the time, when *Mr. Arlingham*, without raising his

eyes, asked his wife whether she liked to go to Charleville?

Elizabeth raised hers with no small degree of astonishment from her book, and staring first at him, and then at the windows, almost doubted whether she should reply at all to so foolish a question.

"Did you hear my question, Mrs. Arlingham?" inquired he, at length, in an angry tone.

"Yes, Mr. Arlingham," she replied coolly, "I did hear your very extraordinary question, and was trying to ascertain how long you had lost your senses, which, from your present proposal, I must suppose you have done."

"I might reply, ever since I was fool enough to marry you," retorted Arlingham; "but I am not in the humour to spar, and therefore merely beg to know what there is in my proposal of going to Charleville which can possibly inspire any doubts of my sanity? I'm sure Vavasour and your sister have said enough upon the subject."

"Look at the weather, Mr. Arlingham. The snow now falls so thickly, that I can scarcely discern the trees through the window, and I dare say the roads are impracticable, for a carriage at least. But perhaps you meant to try a pillion, and take me behind you. It would be *cheaper* than the carriage, you know."

"By G—d, you are enough to provoke a saint!" said Arlingham.

"That does not apply to you, *my love*," she replied, calmly. "However, pillion or carriage, I do not choose to risk my neck through such roads as they must be now; and besides that, I cannot make it convenient. But you can go; you know we are by no means so necessary to each other's happiness as not to endure a *temporary* separation at least."

"I believe," said Arlingham, furiously, "an eternal one would be equally pleasant to both. However, madam——"

"Oh! pray stop there—I can always anticipate the termination of those tremendous 'madams.' You are going to swear

that I shall never go to Charleville at all, I know; and as such an oath will go for nothing, I am happy to save you the trouble of making it, and the shame and folly of being forsworn, because go I will when it suits me."

"That is to say, you will go when your favourite Mr. Germaine, that contemptible puppy, is not in this neighbourhood. Mrs. Arlingham, beware of your conduct—take care how you provoke the observations of others, who may not judge you quite so leniently as I do; for ill as I think of your temper and disposition, and not without reason, I do not suspect you of *vice*. If I did——"

Arlingham paused, and looked very sternly at his wife, who, though certainly innocent of any greater crime than imprudence, could not help shrinking internally from his scrutiny, though she endeavoured to prevent any outward signs of agitation. She was, however, too conscious of having provoked observation by levity of manner, though certainly without any in-

tention of acting materially wrong, to return Arlingham's remarks with her usual spirit, though she could not let such an opportunity escape of giving a *gentle* retort.

"You have great reason for animadversion of this kind," said she, "when you consider your own conduct with your Miss Summers. *I* speak from conviction of a fact—you insult me by suspicions, or at least implications, for which you can have no real foundation. But this is always the way with people who feel conscious of their own guilt, and therefore seek to find excuse in a similar conduct in others."

"Take care I have never occasion to return your own words," said Arlingham, who could not deny his own behaviour had been reprehensible enough in the instance Elizabeth alluded to; "but always recollect, Mrs. Arlingham," he added, "that had you been different *at home*, I had never gone *from home* in search of amusement."

"Since we are got into a strain of mutual complaint and abuse, we had better

adjourn the debate," said Elizabeth, suddenly. "I married with the expectation of happiness, with a gay, good-humoured, agreeable man—one who would have equal pride and pleasure in consulting the wishes of his wife, and generously supplying her wants. How far you have done this, I leave you to judge. I dare say we are mutually disappointed; but I'm afraid we must still continue to drag our chain for many a hopeless year. I, at least, however I may have erred, have never lost sight of *virtue*. Can you say the same? As to Mr. Germaine——"

"The less we say of him the better," interrupted Arlingham. "You do not choose to go to Charleville—very well. Then you shall not, with my connivance, either now or ever. But observe me, Mrs. Arlingham, Mr. Germaine does not visit here any more, and he knows such to be my determination."

"Knows it! Good God! how have you dared to forbid your house to a man who never injured you? The very prohibition

is enough to blast my character. But I too can be resolute, and will in such a cause. You do not seem to understand, Mr. Arlingham, that the best and surest preservative of a wife's honour is a kind and attentive husband. For my own sake, I never will condescend to sacrifice you or myself, but I will not be prevented the pleasure of forming any acquaintance I choose."

Elizabeth was rising indignantly to leave the room, when the entrance of a servant with a note for his master stopped her a moment, for she knew the hand.

Arlingham read it—"Very well," said he; "my compliments to Mr. Germaine, and I wish him a good journey, and have no commissions to trouble him with."

Mr. Arlingham then quitted the room, and left his wife amazingly surprised and indignant at a circumstance she could not account for, nor comprehend. She had seen Mr. Germaine only a day or two before, and no mention had been made of such a journey; on the contrary, some ar-

rangements, which they had mutually approved, seemed to speak of a long continuance in the country. The idea that Arlingham's jealous feelings should really have instigated him to affront Mr. Germaine, by mentioning those vague suspicions, which she was well enough aware he had long indulged, agitated her spirits, and flushed her cheeks with indignant crimson, since, as she had told him, such conduct could only spread abroad ideas which she was assured existed at present only in his own breast. But in this she was mistaken. With all his errors, Arlingham was not naturally of a jealous temper, and his wretched doubts on the present occasion were first raised by the impertinent sneers and smiles of his vulgar mistress, Kitty Summers, who had no pleasure so great as that of abusing his wife, and attempting to reduce her in Arlingham's opinion to her own level. Some whispers had gone abroad from his own servants, who could not avoid knowing the uncomfortable terms on which their master and

mistress lived together, and who saw, more clearly than Elizabeth herself did, the insidious meaning and wishes of the handsome young man who was almost continually with her, and had remarked more accurately than she had done, that he almost always chose for his visits those times when their master was out.

Elizabeth certainly admired him more than she ought, and could not always help contrasting his attentions with her husband's neglect. She had also, very inadvertently and improperly, made him the confidant of her own bitter feelings on Miss Summers's account, little aware that by such imprudence she was giving him a degree of power over herself, of which he was likely enough hereafter to make an advantage. But, in fact, though Elizabeth's actions were reprehensible, her intentions were pure; nor did she think of any consequence beyond a present flirtation with Mr. Germaine, nor did she suspect him of deeper plans than her own. *She acknowledged to herself a degree of*

present satisfaction in mortifying Arlingham, by seeming to prefer Mr. Germaine's opinions, and taking his side in an argument; but still she believed such satisfaction, though not perhaps quite right, yet not materially wrong.

Mr. Germaine, however, was a vain, presumptuous coxcomb, who boasted of a greater degree of intimacy than really did exist between them, and anticipated future success to himself, of which only such a man would have thought. He had no greater pleasure than in inflaming Elizabeth's jealousy of Miss Summers, and thus drawing her on to utter reproaches, in a moment of anger, which cool consideration must condemn. He was, in short, one of those specious, agreeable, dissolute rakes, who make vice tenfold more dangerous by affecting virtue. His manners were elegant, his person handsome, and his conversation so prettily enveloped in *sentiment*, as to hide, from a novice in the world and its arts, its real tendency. Elizabeth hovered on the verge of a precipice, without

being aware of her immediate danger; and to this she was lured, not by vicious inclinations, but merely the desire (which she persuaded herself was innocent) of making reprisals for her husband's neglect and infidelity. All that Arlingham's servants chose to suppose on this occasion, and all their comments on what they heard and saw, reached the ears of Miss Summers, who, hating Elizabeth with a rancour even superior to that she inspired, had no delight so great as repeating every thing to Arlingham, together with all her own surmises on the subject. He was cool and wary, and instead of flying into a rage on the occasion, set himself to make more vigilant observations than he had done before. He was convinced that Elizabeth was innocent of even a *thought* of criminality, but he saw enough to assure him that Germaine was an insidious rascal. He was very prompt in his measures, and, without entering into particulars, gave the gentleman reason to believe his visits would no longer be allowed at Westhaven.

Germaine debated within himself a little while, whether he should or should not take the hint he had received in good part, and retreat quietly, or ask a fierce explanation. He was, however, rather a *placable* youth, and the fruit of his cogitations on the subject was the note already mentioned as received by Arlingham, and which occasioned no little perplexity to Elizabeth, who however did not venture, after the conversation she had just before held on this very topic, to ask any questions, or appear to take any interest in an affair of which she supposed she should hear an explanation from Germaine himself, whose return she was convinced would not be long retarded.

Arlingham never mentioned his name when they met at dinner—a meal which was indeed as little relieved by conversation in general as their breakfast, except a casual visitor occasionally broke the dreary silence.

CHAPTER XIX.

The wind shall whistle o'er her grass-grown grave,
And all within be peace. SOUTHEY.

THE express which carried the news of the birth of an heir to Westhaven, and afterwards proceeded to Charleville, carried also a pressing invitation to Elizabeth from the invalid countess to hasten to Randolph Castle, and enliven the ennui of a sick chamber.

Elizabeth was greatly Harriet's favourite, for their tempers and opinions were much more congenial than either of her other sisters. Most gladly would Mrs. Arlingham have set off immediately on receiving the invitation, which the earl had himself condescended to write; but the same objection she had only a few days before urged against a journey to Charleville, the badness of the roads, must

necessarily be still more forcible in preventing a journey so completely north, and this Arlingham reminded her of, with no small degree of spiteful pleasure.

Elizabeth could not avoid owning him in the right, for the prospect was indeed dreary enough to deter any one from venturing on so long a journey at such a season. She was, besides, rather afraid to say much about the roads being practicable, lest Arlingham should suppose (what really was in some measure the case) that the departure of Mr. Germaine from the country had any share in rendering her fears of travelling less poignant. A visit to Randolph Castle was nevertheless so entirely the summit of delight to Elizabeth, that she was determined not to defer it longer than the weather obliged her, and she wrote to that effect to lord Randolph, without consulting her husband. A visit to Charleville could be paid at any time, and she did not intend that should be any obstacle to the greater pleasure of a journey into Cheshire.

The same love of splendour and magnificence pervaded the hearts of Harriet and Elizabeth, and formed with both the grand good of existence. Althea, indeed, had described Randolph Castle as the dullest of all gloomy habitations, and the earl as wrapt up in stateliness, self-importance, and ill-humour; but Elizabeth knew how very little Althea prized grandeur and state, and therefore chose to believe her a prejudiced describer. The death of the two old formalities, too, must make a great difference in the situation of affairs; and a visit to lady Randolph was decided by Mrs. Arlingham to be the most delightful and desirable of all earthly enjoyments.

The anticipation of it employed almost every moment, nearly to the exclusion of Mr. Germaine himself, who, contrary to her expectations, had never conveyed to her any reason for his suddenly withdrawing, or any intimation of an intention to return. But all these gay visions of greatness and splendour, which she fully meant the disappearance of the snow should rea-

lize, were checked by the melancholy tidings of Isabella's situation, who was scarcely expected to live till she could reach Charleville, where she was anxiously requested to repair, if she wished ever again to behold her sister.

This request was made more with a view to her own feelings than those of Isabella, who had gradually sunk into an apathy so complete, as hardly to know those immediately about her, and almost entirely to banish the remembrance of all who had been some time absent—even Philipson himself, the fatal origin of all her sufferings, was imperfectly recollected.

Judging of Elizabeth's feelings by her own, Althea believed she would hereafter suffer much regret if she had not an opportunity of seeing once more a sister whom she had once loved. Elizabeth certainly did not receive the intimation of her sister's immediate danger, without considerable emotion, for though cold, she was not callous; and though she had persuaded herself that Isabella would eventually

210 THE BALANCE OF COMFORT.

recover, and blamed Althea for thinking the worst, yet now that recovery was decidedly impossible, she felt as a sister must feel. Arlingham would have refused her going to Charleville on any less urgent occasion; but under such circumstances as the present, he could not object; and she set off, attended by her maid, as soon as possible after the summons, and reached her sister's only just in time to take a last farewell of the insensible Isabella.

Passing hastily over a scene of so much affliction, we shall only observe, that by a merciful ordination, the unfortunate Isabella passed from life to death in a tranquil slumber, her last moments undisturbed by cruel recollections. She died the victim of unkindness on the part of her husband, and a too-romantic indulgence of overcharged sensibility on her own. Disappointed of happiness in the form she expected to find it, she resolutely shut her eyes against every other means of comfort; and with all the selfishness attached to romance, and what is usually

known by the name of sensibility, she disregarded wholly the feelings of all around her, and thought only of indulging her own. Yet she did not mean to be unkind; for her heart was made up of every tender and affectionate sentiment, which having been carried to excess in one particular instance, seemed to have left no room for less interesting or more widely-extended feelings. Whatever her errors might have been, she had now expiated them; and in "the grave, where all things are forgotten," she rested in peace. None grieved for her like Althea, for none had entered like her into all her joys and sorrows. She had been the principal object of her cares and attentions ever since the sad change of situation which had alienated the other sisters, and made them fly from troubles and privations which she had contentedly shared, and sedulously endeavoured to lessen.

It was now, in the hours of severe distress, that Althea learned still more justly to appreciate the tenderness and excel-

lence of her husband's character. With the truest kindness and affection he soothed her affliction, and made every arrangement which he thought would give her pleasure, for the present comfort and future advantage of the children, upon whom a comfortable independence was securely settled, completely out of the power of any attempts their profligate father might in after times make to snatch it from them.

Althea made every possible effort to conquer her feelings, so as, at least, to prevent their expression from distressing others ; and aware how much her husband's domestic comfort must have been broken in upon by Isabella's melancholy abode in his house, though neither in word or look had he ever betrayed that he did so, she now exerted herself to banish gloom by being tranquil at least, if not happy, and reserving for solitary moments the natural indulgence of regret,

Sir Montague was one on whom conduct of this kind could not be lost ; and

he proposed, by way of enlivening them all, that he and Althea, together with Mrs. Vernon, whose spirits continued dreadfully depressed, should accompany Mrs. Arlingham in her projected visit to Randolph Castle, to which place Lord Randolph had invited them all. The plan met with great approbation from Althea, but Mrs. Vernon preferred staying behind, and settling herself in her future abode, a small but pleasant house at the entrance of Charleville Park. Miss Orford was to take up her abode at Charleville during their absence, and take charge of the little Philipsons.

Elizabeth greatly approved this plan, for she saw in it an assurance that her own would not be frustrated, of which, notwithstanding her self-boasting, she had before no small doubts. She was tired to death of Charleville, whence, of course, all visiting was at present banished, and longed for any change—"I never saw such a stupid place as this is in my life," said she,

as her maid assisted her to dress; "did you, Girdlestone? Why, Westhaven is lively in comparison."

The maid, of course, agreed to this observation.

"And what a figure I do look in mourning!" continued Elizabeth.

She was going on, when a servant brought her a letter, which at once checked her oratory, and brought the colour into her conscious cheeks. She hastily broke the seal, and Girdlestone proceeded to talk and braid her luxuriant hair, regardless of the interruption her voice gave to her mistress.

"Dear me, no, ma'am," said Girdlestone; "I don't think you can look amiss in any thing, particular in black, with your sweet complexion and fine colour. I think, for my share, that nothink can be more becoming than black velvet, and a transparent black crape tucker and sleeves, on such a white skin. And when you get some beautiful *black jet* ornaments for

your fine hair, ma'am, I think, I'm sure, you must look quite beautiful, ma'am ; for nothink can——”

Elizabeth wondered her “ fine hair” should be so much longer in arranging this day than usual, and raising her eyes to the mirror, before which she sat, she saw that Girdlestone’s eyes were as busily engaged as her hands, in perusing the letter over her shoulder, which she had, very unthinkingly exposed to her view. Hastily she closed the letter, and, with an attempt at indifference, threw it carelessly on the table. She looked earnestly at her maid, to see if she had comprehended much of the import of what she had certainly been impertinent enough to read. Girdlestone threw into her face its most vacant and innocent expression, and Elizabeth ventured to wonder whether *Mr. Arlingham* would really come for her—“ He talks of it in this letter,” said she, again glancing at Girdlestone, who, though she knew as well as her mistress that the letter was

from Mr. Germaine, containing an explanation of his late conduct, began to ask innumerable questions relative to home. Elizabeth replied carelessly, and her dress being arranged, she took the letter, which the maid hoped she would have forgotten, and locked it into a drawer. She then affected to examine a very handsome white muslin dress, and saying it would probably be quite old-fashioned before she could wear it again, she threw it to Girdlestone, and bade her keep it.

The maid thanked her a thousand times, made some farther remark on the letter from Westhaven, and retired to laugh at her mistress in her heart, and compose a story for the amusement of her fellow-servants when she got home, and the edification of Miss Kitty Summers.

CHAPTER XX.

n are April when they woo, December when they wed;
maids are May when they are maids; but the sky changes
when they are wives. SHAKESPEARE.

R. Germaine's letter, which he intended
ould give Elizabeth a vast deal of plea-
re, was destined to be the source of
nsiderable vexation to her, and she felt
ghly offended at his daring to write at
. She had been indiscreet enough to
ry on a flirtation with him, certainly
ainst Mr. Arlingham's approbation, and
th the intention of making him angry,
t she had never really harboured a
ought of greater impropriety than this
rtation; and Mr. Germaine, who evi-
ntly in his letter believed himself much
ore highly admired, disgusted, instead
pleasing her, by his presumptuous va-

nity. He mentioned his intended return to the neighbourhood of Westhaven, as if he supposed her deeply interested in his so doing, and as if he expected to be received by her with great distinction. In short, his whole letter bespoke him an arrogant coxcomb, and did more towards making Elizabeth ashamed of him, and her attentions to him, than any length of time passed in complimentary conversation, however extravagant, could have done.

Certain it is, that we all *listen* to nonsense agreeably spoken, much more contentedly than we *read* it, and perhaps because we are apt to forget as we listen to the rhapsodies, which disgust as they are *expressed* by a letter.

This unfortunate letter had been delivered with several others to lady Vavasour; and without noticing either the handwriting or the post-mark, she had sent it immediately up to Elizabeth. She naturally supposed it came from Arlingham, and asked her sister, at dinner, when they

might expect him, as she hoped the letter just received was to announce his coming? Elizabeth blushed painfully; and not daring to acknowledge the real writer, and not at all expecting her husband at Charleville, she replied that Mr. Arlingham had not said a word respecting his coming, but gave her reason rather to suppose he wished her immediate return home. Tired to death of the dullness of Charleville, Elizabeth was impatient to get back to Westhaven, preparatory to the meditated journey into Cheshire, which sir Montague wished, on Althea's account, should take place as soon as the weather permitted. It was settled, that same afternoon round the fire, that they should all three set out for Westhaven the end of the week, and Elizabeth's servant was to go first, and prepare Mr. Arlingham for their arrival.

In the midst of their consultation on the letters to be sent off to Randolph Castle, the door opened, and most unexpectedly,

most undesired by his wife, Mr. Arlingham himself entered the room. Surprise for a moment kept them all dumb; but the baronet immediately recollected himself, and welcomed his guest with all his usual cordiality; whilst Elizabeth's confusion was so evident, as not only to excite Althea's notice, but her suspicion that all could not be right, respecting a letter which had so immediately preceded his coming, yet never mentioned it. Arlingham, little accustomed to be well received by his lady, did not seem much to remark her present coldness; but turning to Althea, he said—"I am sorry I could not write to say I might probably be here to-day, but in fact, I was so undecided, that I did not like to keep you in uncertainty respecting my coming, and possibly prevent some engagement."

"I thought Mrs. Arlingham did hear from you to-day, and we were all regretting the little chance there appeared of your coming amongst us," replied sir Mon-

ague, who had no idea of any thing wrong or mysterious in Elizabeth's conduct.

Althea gave him a look, which, though it puzzled him, seemed to beg his silence; and Mrs. Arlingham's perturbation was now evident enough. Her husband looked at her with a scrutinizing eye, and hers could not meet the investigation calmly.

An awkward silence ensued; but Arlingham, by a great effort, conquered his feelings, and forced himself to talk on different topics; and some degree of composure was restored. The two ladies soon after retired, leaving the gentlemen to a quiet discussion over their wine.

Althea hoped her sister would have introduced the subject of this strange letter; but Elizabeth, though she longed for advice, felt ashamed to ask it, and embarrassed how to speak about it; for to own the truth in this instance involved a long and overwhelming acknowledgment of imprudence on her part, which she knew Althea would very justly condemn. Their tête-

Elizabeth, therefore, was constrained and silent, and after a few attempts at indifferent topics, they each sunk into a reverie, which lasted till a summons to the drawing-room relieved them both. The evening was dull and heavy, for the whole party had food for thought or conjecture in their own mind. Arrington could only stay one day at Charleville; and so great was his impatience to get Elizabeth home, that this secret of the letter might be unfolded, that he gave up his original intention of going on to Adderley, where he had meant to carry his wife before they returned to Westhaven. Unwilling to ask any questions which might, he feared, lead to unpleasant explanations, and create quarrels between him and Elizabeth whilst at Charleville, he behaved much as usual to her, and she began to hope that he had not observed the circumstance which gave her so much uneasiness, and her spirits rose in proportion as her fears declined. Much as she affected to despise him, she yet, in reality, dreaded his

tempests of passionate anger, which she had once or twice excited before, and still more she feared the execution of a threat he had held out of separating himself from her, since in that case she anticipated only a return to her mother's house, which was of all things the most stupid, and a home which Mrs. Vernon's frettings and anger on such an occasion would render wretched. At sir Montague's plan of accompanying them to Westhaven, Arlingham expressed his satisfaction, though he would not consent to defer his own journey a day or two to accommodate any of the party. In consequence of this, the Vavasours, instead of going with them, agreed to follow without so much inconvenient haste; and Elizabeth, much against her wish, was condemned to a *tête-à-tête* in the carriage with her sullen and suspicious spouse. They did not proceed far before Arlingham began to question her, and though really frightened, she persevered in her usual contumelious manner.

"Pray, Mrs. Arlingham," said he, "what

letter is this you affected to have received from me?"

"I never affected to have received any from you."

"What then did Vavasour and your sister mean, when they talked of such a one? I'm sure they understood that you had received one."

"I cannot be answerable for their understanding. You had better catechize them when they come to Westhaven."

"I suspect my catechism must be made elsewhere," said Arlingham, sternly.

"You certainly did receive a letter which they supposed came from me."

"I have received many letters, and do not always think it necessary to shew the signatures."

"But you shall shew me this, and I suspect you will tell me the day on which it was written."

"I have fortunately deprived myself of the power of shewing you any thing concerning this letter, for I have destroyed it, and you may scold or threaten as you will.

"I am not ashamed of any correspondent of mine, I assure you."

"I should think you might be, if, as I conclude, the epistle in question was from that vain puppy, Germaine. 'Tis pity such fellows were ever taught to write, or rather to scribble."

"Fortunately Miss Summers has no such drawback on her recommendations. I even doubt if she can read, at least not written hand, so that all her adorer's letters, I imagine, are done in *printed characters*, and I should hope *spelt* on purpose for her accommodation, with grammar to match."

This specimen of a conjugal journey will convince every one of the felicity of this pair, and in this style of recrimination did they amuse each other all the way home, when, after a meal comfortable only from its silence, they sought the blessing of *repose*, in separate apartments, anticipating the pleasures of the ensuing day.

Elizabeth was somewhat startled and

326 THE BALANCE OF COMFORT.

alarmed on descending the next morning to the breakfast-room, to learn that Arlingham had gone out on horseback very early, attended by a servant, who had a travelling-case with some of his master's linen behind him, and that he had said it might be some days before they returned.

It was very certain that Arlingham suspected Germaine of an improper intimacy at his house, that he was almost convinced the letter Elizabeth had certainly received was from him, and that he had threatened to canvass the matter thoroughly. She therefore believed he was now gone off for that purpose, though she hoped he had no correct notion which way to go in search of him. So completely was she terrified at the idea of all that might follow from her own folly, and Mr. Germaine's impertinence, that she resolved to give up for ever all acquaintance with him, and even, in the alarm her husband's absence occasioned, determined to make those concessions which, she hoped, might conciliate his offended spirit. She could not

endure to think he suspected her of worse than folly, and she flattered herself an explanation, and a few expressions of contrition, would restore him, at least, to his usual complacency.

Three or four days were heavily passed in uncertainty and augmenting terror, for though she cared but little for Arlingham in her heart, and steadily wished herself unmarried, she shrunk from the idea of exposing him to danger and a duel, as well as from the publicity attending such an exploit to her own character. Arlingham returned at length, but said not one word of his journey. James, whom Elizabeth questioned, said they had gone together to a Mr. Woodstock's, a friend of his master; that Mr. Arlingham had, after the first day, gone somewhere by himself, and only returned to Mr. Woodstock's the evening preceding his coming home. She could learn nothing from all this, at all satisfactory, and she dared not ask any direct questions of her husband. He was civil but very cold in his manners; and

though he saw she wished to enter into some kind of explanation, he always checked her the moment she began, by turning the conversation or leaving the room, and thus chilled the few remaining sentiments of kindness she yet retained towards him.

CHAPTER XXI.

When Jove in anger strikes the blow,
 Oft with the bad the righteous bleed;
 Yet with sure steps, though lame and slow,
 Vengeance o'ertakes the trembling villain's speed.

FRANCIS'S *Horace*.

THE same sullen tranquillity prevailed at Westhaven Park till the arrival of sir Montague and lady Vavasour; and Elizabeth, thoroughly uncomfortable, and not daring to enter upon any thing like a discussion of the only subject on which she could think, anticipated with impatience the appearance of her sister, whose advice

sl
re
el
hi
se
so
si
ra
as
sn
st
w
nc
de
th
pr
fe
ha
za
A
sh
pr
h
d
P

she meant immediately to ask, and whose mediation she believed would have some effect in restoring Arlingham to, at least, his usual complacency. Elizabeth had seen him in a tempest of passion, and had sometimes been frightened at the expression of his fury ; but Arlingham, even in a rage, was not so annoying or so alarming as Arlingham in his present humour of sneering satire or freezing civility—"the storm was woe—the pause was fear." He was no great reader of the human heart, nor did he trouble himself to try and understand his wife's in particular, and he therefore could not discover that this was precisely the moment in which, by a different mode of treatment, he might perhaps have gained more power over Elizabeth than he had ever yet possessed. Aware and ashamed of her own errors, she viewed his with less indignation and prejudice ; and a little kind but serious exhortation, delivered with mildness and tenderness, and a generous oblivion of the past, might now have had a lasting good

effect on her future character in general, and particular behaviour to himself; but Arlingham's was not a liberal or generous mind, and he persevered in a cold sarcastic manner, which at last roused every fiery particle of her nature, and their present silence seemed to portend only future storms, as violent as the past.

At length the Vavasours reached Westhaven; and to Elizabeth's great astonishment and satisfaction, Arlingham made no objection to her accompanying them to Randolph Castle, where, however, he declined going himself—a circumstance she rejoiced in, and perhaps none of the party regretted.

Elizabeth, who had found all her old disgust and ill-humour revived towards her husband, by his late impolitic treatment of her, no longer thought of making Althea her confidant, or requesting any interference of a conciliatory nature, and indeed endeavoured to laugh off any inquiry her sister attempted to make relative to recent events. Althea was exceed-

ingly vexed at this, for she easily discovered that Elizabeth and Arlingham were even more uncomfortable than before, and was convinced from his manner that some plan lurked in his mind, of no pleasant nature, and unsuspected by her. However, since Elizabeth was determined to be reserved, Althea could only observe and grieve in silence, unable to offer advice or assistance which were not drawn forth by confidence on the other side.

After a few unpleasant days spent at Westhaven, the sisters took leave of Arlingham with almost equal coldness; Althea's adieus being, however, the least freezing; and escorted by the baronet, set out for Randolph Castle.

The weather was now becoming mild and pleasant; the roads very good, and the spirits of the little party exhilarated by travelling and change of scene. Their time was at their own disposal, and they loitered occasionally on the road, as fancy or a pleasant situation prompted.

Nearly a week was thus idled away;

but Randolph Castle at length appeared at a distance, with its dark walls and towers just rising above the beautiful woods in which it was embosomed.

Our travellers were received with more state than affection; and Althea, in particular, felt herself chilled by the frigid manners of Harriet, who necessarily appeared even more cold than her lord, when the claims of kindred are remembered. Lady Lucretia was always in buckram, and from her nothing else was expected. The countess still looked delicate, as if not wholly recovered from her late confinement, and was very silent and grave; but whether from real want of spirits, or the dignity of state, her company could not determine. The earl looked very ill, and was a complete martyr to the gout, and as peevish as gentlemen so afflicted usually are. The heir was a fine lively boy; and as he had the good fortune to be resigned entirely to the care and management of his nurse, an elderly woman who had brought up a large family of her

own with great success, he had every chance of being healthy. Lady Lucretia in vain endeavoured to establish herself in the nursery, and exclaimed most bitterly against the barbarity of washing the dear boy in cold water, and not warming his bed whenever he was laid down. She even made serious complaints to her brother and the countess; but they wisely left the affair to Mrs. Grey, and lady Lucretia submitted in sullen silence.

Harriet and her sisters, even when without other company, seemed to have few ideas or topics of confidential intercourse, though both married most respectably. Althea indeed in *high* life, they were yet at an immeasurable distance from herself, and she was so awfully dignified, particularly since she had become the mother of a future earl, that Althea felt herself really uncomfortable; and even Elizabeth was not at her ease, though her own pride was not very inferior to Harriet's. Of poor Isabella, lady Randolph spoke with indifference, nor appeared to lament her loss.

"She is, *I* think, happily removed," said she; "and *I* should have thought so, even if all the calamities you mention had not befallen her, since *I* can conceive nothing so dreadful as the life she was condemned to lead, even at the best. If she had recovered, *I* intended to have had her here, for *I* am a good deal alone, and she would have wanted a home. Mrs. Vernon, *I* suppose, keeps the children?"

"The children are now mine; and whilst *I* had a home, my poor Isabella would never have wanted one," replied Althea, much hurt.

Harriet coloured, but made no farther remark.

Two or three parties, remarkable only for their heavy and fatiguing splendour, were invited in honour of sir Montague and lady Vavasour, who, however, found no pleasure in them; and he was much amused by watching Althea struggling to suppress a yawn, and keep her eyes open.

After a week thus drowsily worn away, sir Montague prepared to fulfil a scheme

he had planned before he left home, which was to take the opportunity of being so near Chester, and go to Ireland for a few days, where he had some business which required his presence. He would have taken Althea, but she always suffered very much from the sea, and was besides apprehensive of meeting Philipson, who, she had every reason to believe, was in that country. It was therefore decided that she should remain at the castle till the baronet's return, and then go back to Charleville. She fancied Elizabeth had no intention of returning home at present, for she and Harriet seemed pleased at being together; and the dullness of the castle was relieved to lady Randolph by having her favourite sister there, whilst to Mrs. Arlingham any place was preferable to her own house, and any society more agreeable than her husband's.

Sir Montague Vavasour arrived safely at Dublin, and lost no time in settling the business which called him there. He heard repeatedly of Philipson and Moly-

neux, who continued, with their respective ladies, to live in the same style of dissipation and *amity* as they had done at the Lea. They both had commissions in the same regiment, then quartered there, and more remarkable for hard drinking, deep play, and various other *accomplishments* in the same style, than for any thing praiseworthy. Desirous to see Philipson, and inform him of the sad changes which had lately taken place in his once happy family, and anxious at the same time to withdraw him, if possible, from scenes of vice so degrading, sir Montague made two or three fruitless efforts to introduce himself to his notice. In vain he called at Philipson's lodgings, or invited him to his. Conscious of his own unworthiness, and dreading the lectures he yet affected to laugh at and despise, Philipson sedulously endeavoured to avoid every place where he thought he probably might meet the baronet; but chance at length threw them in each other's way, just before Vavasour was quitting Dublin.

Mrs. Fermor was hanging on Philipson's arm, and was the first to observe sir Montague's approach. A meeting was inevitable; and Philipson dismissing his companion, advanced with evident reluctance. Coldness equally marked the manners of each; but sir Montague was dignified and at ease, whilst the other evidently felt the painful inferiority of vice.

"I have taken some pains to see you, Mr. Philipson," said the baronet, after a few moments of mutual silence, "in order to give you that information respecting your family, which I must suppose you are not yet wholly uninterested to hear. Will you, now I have been fortunate enough to meet with you, accompany me to my lodgings?"

Philipson bowed in silence, nor, though really anxious at heart to inquire into the situation of those he had forsaken so cruelly, dared he to ask a single question; for the grave and pointed manner of his companion convinced him he had nothing of a pleasant nature to relate. A short walk

brought them to Merriion-square; and when they were seated in Vavasour's apartment, he, after some preparation, informed Philipson of those circumstances which had followed his departure from the Lea. Of much misery, much suffering to Isabella, Philipson was prepared to hear, but not of her death; and, ill as he had treated her, he yet felt her loss severely—certainly not less severely for his past conduct towards her. Conscience would be heard; and as he buried his face in his handkerchief, and gave way to those natural feelings which even long-continued habits of vice and profligacy had not quite driven from his breast, he could not help recalling all Isabella's virtues—her patient endurance of all his storms of temper—her unremitted endeavours to remedy, by an economy on her part, too strict for health or comfort, the extravagance on his, and the thousand instances of her unbounded affection for him, which though, perhaps, harshly repulsed at the moment, or sneered at, were now remembered with many

a pang of bitter contrition. She was at peace, and receiving, in another and a better world, the reward of long-suffering and patient endurance here—a world he had for ever forfeited.

To these sentiments, which extreme anguish drew from him, in the bitter tones of repentance, Vavasour made such replies as might be expected from *such a man*, and with the consoling hopes of a Christian, he mingled the more worldly advice which might add to their efficacy in a mind like Philipson's.

To give advice without offering the means by which it might be carried into execution, was not the character of our baronet. To remove Philipson from the baneful effects of his present associates was the first plan; and for this purpose he offered immediately to furnish him with such sums as might release him from every pecuniary obligation to remain with Molyneux.

"I see," said Vavasour, "you have exchanged the gown for the sword—if you

are disposed to change once more, and turn the sword into a pruning-hook, I am happy to be able now to offer you the means of so doing. I have estates here or in England, which are equally eligible, and into which I can put you whenever you will allow me. Whatever embarrassments may fetter you, either in England, to Molyneux, or elsewhere, I will gladly assist you to overcome. I know the regiment to which you belong will be speedily called from this country, or I would not offer to place you in any situation here; for to insure your future success in life, I am convinced the first and most important step is to relinquish those connexions which have been so fatal to you. Without this all I can do will avail nothing. You now have it in your power to return to those habits of domestic virtue from which false friends have so cruelly lured you—you may again become a respectable member of society—the happy and worthy father of your children. I offer you, upon these terms, my friendship and that

of Althea, a competency, the best society, and the means of virtue and happiness. Decide then on accepting these advantages. As a Christian, as a man, as the husband of her so dear to my Althea, I adjure you not to throw from you the present means of regaining the place in the heart of the good, and of society in general, which you have so fatally lost. Go with me to England—no one shall reproach or insult you. As a brother and a friend, I will myself introduce you; and Althea's heart will rejoice at your return to virtue."

Philipson seemed much moved by sir Montague's earnestness, and the present subdued state of his feelings appeared favourable to that return to respectability which Vavasour continued to urge.

Evening found him almost determined to accept his offers; and, perhaps, could Vavasour have kept him from the society of his loose companions for the rest of the time he himself remained in Ireland, he

might have succeeded in his good intentions, and Philipson have become at last a proselyte to virtue; but as soon as he left Vavasour, he retired to his own lodgings, not expecting to find any one but Mrs. Fermor, who shared them with him. She, however, apprehensive of the effects of an interview with the baronet, with whose character she was well acquainted, had taken care to collect the usual riotous party, who soon judged from Philipson's sober countenance and grave manners, that he was at least wavering. This was the signal for a double share of mirth, and ridicule, and profligacy.

Philipson, always weak and undecided on the side of goodness and propriety, was at last brought to join in the laugh against himself and Vavasour—the latter was quizzed, ridiculed, and abused, for the very offers which, but for this fatal meeting, might have been attended with the happiest effects; and Philipson, forgetful of his duty to himself, his children, and his God—forgetful also of the wife who

had died a martyr to his vices, and whom, only a few hours before, he had bewailed with many a bitter feeling, ungratefully joined in the low scurrility poured forth from many a drunken tongue against the man who would have been so true a benefactor, who even then shielded his children from the wretchedness to which he had condemned them; and he finished the orgies of the night by writing a letter of insolent defiance, and a positive rejection of all his offers, to sir Montague. 'Tis true, he did it under the influence of intoxication; but the baronet, though under other circumstances he might have been more lenient, could make no allowances for a man who could act like Philipson, in a situation like his.

He quitted Ireland the following day, and saw the man he so anxiously wished to have served and saved, with a face flushed by wine, insolently pass him without any other recognition than a rude stare and a laugh.

CHAPTER XXII.
~~~~~

“ The visit paid, with ecstasy we come,  
 As from a seven years’ transportation, home;  
 And there resume an unembarrass’d brow,  
 Recovering what we lost, we know not how;  
 The faculties that seem’d reduc’d to nought,  
 Expression, and the privilege of thought.”

SIR Montague Vavasour, on his return to Randolph Castle, found Althea heartily tired of her visit, and very eager to be again at liberty at Charleville. The inhabitants of the castle seemed as if they possessed neither heart or mind, and moved from one magnificent apartment to another, in costly attire and with solemn faces, as if mirth or gaiety were actually offences to morality. These well-dressed machines seemed a part of the chair which they sat on, and to possess almost as few ideas as feelings. Harriet found all this

very delightful, and Elizabeth was quickly imbibing similar notions.

At her request, lady Randolph had written to Arlingham for leave to detain her at the castle for some time; and contrary to Elizabeth's expectations, he had given a ready, but cold acquiescence; and this being the case, sir Montague and lady Vavasour gladly prepared for a journey homewards, where they found more of real happiness than in any other place. They were not sorry to return without Mrs. Arlingham, whose querulous complaints at being again condemned to the solitude of Westhaven, preferable only to the superior dullness of Charleville, had annoyed them both very much. The civil *nothings* of politeness (and even between persons so nearly connected, they really amounted to no more in this instance) were soon adjusted; and the carriage which was to restore Althea to home and her domestic delights, already past the gloomy precincts of grandeur; and her spirits rose in proportion to her dis-

tance from scenes of such heartless pomp. Vavasour shared in these sentiments, and equally anticipated the happiness of Charleville, where Mrs. Charlton and Mrs. Finch had promised to meet them, and where Miss Orford and her little wards already were. Mrs. Vernon was now settled in her lovely little retreat, within a pleasant walk of her daughter. Mrs. Sedley and her children were happily placed near Torrington Lodge, where the kind friendship of the inestimable Mrs. Charlton had secured them all the comforts which money and situation could supply.

"Now then," exclaimed Althea, as she saw herself surrounded by such dear friends at her own social and peaceful fireside—"now then I am settled, I trust, for the summer. I think we have paid all our visiting debts, at least to any distance, and I may uninterruptedly put in practice the quiet and domestic schemes I have so pleasantly laid out in theory. I cannot bear to think of leaving Charleville, now it is getting so beautiful."

“I intended to have taken you to town, and *enjoyed* a tumultuous six weeks of fatiguing pleasure,” said Vavasour, smiling; “but you are so unfashionable, I dare say I shall not be able to prevail on you to go. But, however, to be really serious, there is one visit I wish you to make before we sit down for the summer. I wish to take you for a week to Adderley. ’Tis very true your brother deserves but little attention from any of you, and his insipid wife must be a disagreeable companion; but I am a great advocate for family harmony, and so I know are you, my love, and would make some sacrifices to secure it. Mr. Vernon has made many advances *of late* towards a better understanding and more intercourse between us, and I wish, unless you find it very repugnant to your wishes, you would go for a few days to Adderley.”

Althea, though she would rather have gone anywhere else, both on account of the dislike she felt to her sister-in-law, and the vicinity of Adderley to the Lea and Feltham vicarage, nevertheless *cheerfully*

acquiesced in her husband's wishes; and an early day was fixed, in compliance with another letter from George, to pay this visit, equally fatiguing both to herself and Vavasour, and, if the truth had been told, not much more desired by Mr. and Mrs. George Vernon.

The meeting between these near relations was not marked by any extraordinary delight. George was coldly civil, but then he was never much otherwise to any one, and was indeed less frigid than usual to his sister, since she no longer wanted any thing from him, either for herself or any other part of the family. He found Vavasour had secured a comfortable provision for the orphans of Isabella, and he complimented him upon the generosity he could admire in another, though he would never have practised it himself.

Althea found Mrs. George Vernon more silly and affected than ever, and perpetually alluding to her situation, which she, and her equally-weak mother, made an excuse for the most determined indolence;

and a plea for her having every absurd wish gratified. She was civil, however, to lady Vavasour, though it was evident she envied her title, and frequently compared the enchanting sound of "your ladyship" with plain "madam."

Mrs. Pringle had never cordially forgiven Althea for the preference the baronet had on every occasion shewn towards her, in contempt of her own Phoebe's superior thousands, and evinced her still-existing displeasure by not inviting either her or sir Montague to one of her mighty *crams*, an omission for which they were both very grateful. Lady Vavasour would have been equally thankful had lady Cotman been as kind; but an opportunity of giving a grand dinner, and saying spiteful things, was too agreeable to her ladyship to be passed over, and a personal invitation rendered a refusal impossible, though Althea dreaded nothing so much; for there she knew she should have the misery of meeting all the Probys, and she was too



well aware of lady Cotman's want of delicacy to hope for the suppression of any circumstances relative to Feltham which might be supposed painful to her to hear.

Althea reckoned right. The first people she saw, on her entrance into the drawing-room, were Mr. and Mrs. Proby, with the rector's mother and sisters. Mrs. Pringle was there also, and Mrs. Ogilvie, and several other persons to whom it was known Althea had a particular *objection*, on account of their conduct to Isabella.

Mrs. Proby the elder seemed to have no idea of any delicacy in speaking of Feltham or Fairfield.

"Your ladyship wouldn't know Feltham, my lady," said she, turning abruptly to Althea. "My son is of a very improving turn, and he has already made so many alterations in the house. The gardening time is hardly come yet, you know; but he has turned that stupid window in the keeping-parlour, that used to look out on the dull lawn, towards the road, so that now I see every thing most *beautiful*. I

have been used to live cheerful, and I'd rather be choked with dust than not see carriages and horsemen. My son means to pull down that glittering *avery*, for I think, with my son, that it's a thing of no use, and not fit for people in our situation. I think my lady, your ladyship never see my son's house at Fairfield. No, I recollect, Mr. Philipson never gained possession of that living. 'Tis a sweet place indeed, and my son has a good taste for improvements. Not but what he is very prudent too; for, as I say, without prudence nothing can be enough to carry a man through, and I'm sure every thing is so dear. Why now would you believe it, Mrs. Ogilvie," she turned to that lady as she spoke, "I give ninepence halfpenny a-pound for beef yesterday, and not prime neither; and butter and eggs is enormous."

Althea, at once hurt and disgusted by Mrs. Proby's indelicate mention of circumstances so nearly touching her most susceptible feelings, gladly left her and Mrs. Ogilvie to settle the price of various

articles, and seated herself, by way of relief, near Mrs. Pringle, who was in earnest conversation with lady Cotman, and, by the immediate cessation as Althea drew near, evidently of herself or her concerns. Mrs. Pringle winked at lady Cotman, and *appeared* to continue her speech thus, though, in fact, the subject was started for the occasion—

“ And indeed, lady Cotman, as I was a telling your la’ship, I am so peticklarly sitivated; for vhen Mr. P. is so unvell as he is just now, I cannot invite a large party vith any comfort. I feel quite distressed to think I cannot fix a day for your ladyship and lady Wawasour to dine at Lark-Hall; and this is just about the time too that ve generally give our three great dinners annivally vonce a-year.”

Lady Vavasour begged no apologies might be made, and lady Cotman, with her usual proud and sullen look, began very unceremoniously to question Althea about Philipson, and what was to become of his children—“ I heard,” said she, “ that

sir Montague had actually settled an independent fortune on them, besides taking them entirely to his own house, but I contradicted it. I could not believe it."

"You may always venture to believe whatever you hear of sir Montague that does honour to human nature, madam," replied Althea. "In all that concerns my sister's children, he has acted in a manner beyond all praise."

"Humph! Poor things! I'm glad to hear it," said lady Cotman, with any expression but that of pleasure in her face. "'Tis well some of poor Bella's sisters have married *happily*, as your ladyship seems to have done. How is Mrs. Arlingham, lady Vavasour? and the countess of Randolph? I have heard they do not speak of *their* husbands as you do. Lord Randolph was much too old, at least I thought so in *another* instance."

Lady Cotman looked at the starched, thin, bony figure of her eldest daughter, and drew up. Miss Cotman was smiling with more than her usual graciousness

upon sir Montague, who stood before her, evidently saying something very gallant.'

Althea looked and smiled too, for she recollected how ardently both Miss Cotman and her mamma had hoped she would herself have lured the baronet.

Lady Cotman observed the smile, and whispered to Mrs. Pringle, that poor lady Vavasour was intolerably jealous—so vexed at her husband's flirtation with Miss Cotman. "I know very well that *smiles* are not always genuine—Mrs. Pringle and her ladyship's are easily translated. Sir Montague certainly did pay great attention to Miss Cotman once. But, however, he was worth catching by one who had no other chance. Miss Pringle, too, I think, had some reason to hope."

"To *hope*, ma'am!" returned Mrs. Pringle, frowning. "That seems an odd word for my daughter. Sir Mountago *hoped*, ma'am, and indeed was all but *ingaged*; but there's no being aware of artful endeavours. However, you know we are all relations and friends now."

Such were the general sentiments of envy and ill-nature harboured against a young woman, whose only fault was her too-evident superiority over others, and her having attached, without an effort, a man whom every other girl was vainly endeavouring by every art to attract.

Althea was fully aware of the dislike she had incurred from the disappointed Misses and their mammas, and indeed could hardly be surprised at lady and Miss Cotman's enmity, since she and her two eldest sisters had, one after the other, carried off the men to whom Miss Cotman had aspired.

A few days were heavily yawned over, and Althea began to think the debt of propriety had been sufficiently paid. Sir Montague, tired to death of the fancies and follies of Mrs. George Vernon, disgusted with the selfishness and frigidity of George, and the vulgarity of Mrs. Pringle, was equally desirous of returning home; and after a visit of ten days, and an invitation to the party to return it at Charle-ville, they parted as they had met, with

the same sentiments, the same feelings, and none so prevalent as the wish of not meeting again speedily.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

~~~~~

Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see,
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.
In every work, regard the writer's end,
Since none can compass more than they intend.

POPE.

To trace Althea's life through the minute events of years, would swell our volumes to a size much beyond the usual bulk of a novel. We flatter ourselves that the specimens already given of her character, will impress our readers with a conviction that she could never materially swerve from the aimable traits which marked her early youth, whilst that of her husband, congenial in every thing good and excellent with her own, combined to promise *as much* happiness, or indeed more, than

is generally to be found in married life. None, whatever their merits, can expect uninterrupted felicity in any state. Tempers, however sweet and placid, must occasionally clash, and opinions differ; but we may venture to believe that two persons like Althea and Vavasour, sensible, amiable, and good-tempered, with an adequate share of worldly riches, and a just idea of themselves, each other, and things in general, bade fair to be more than commonly blest, as they were more than commonly deserving, and equally matched.

We find, indeed, from some letters addressed by lady Vavasour to Mrs. Charlton, about five years subsequent to the conclusion of our last chapter, that she was still of opinion, that in her *own* case matrimony was the happiest state, but that, take the world through, the contrary idea was most prevalent.

From these letters, we, the biographers of the Vernon family, and of others connected with their affairs, find a statement of the happiness or otherwise of the cha-

racters principally pourtrayed in these pages, and we are therefore enabled to satisfy our readers how the "Balance of Comfort" seemed usually to incline, and what was the situation of our most prominent *dramatis personæ* at the end of the above-mentioned period of five years.

Lord Randolph (we give the distinction to greatness) and his sister, lady Lucretia, died within a few months of each other, but not till even Harriet herself began to think splendour and rank might be bought too dearly. As old age and infirmity increased, so did the earl's asperity and jealousy; the latter passion, especially, became dreadful almost beyond endurance. Prudence herself was sometimes near deserting her post, and Harriet, cold and callous as she was, could scarcely forbear retorting. She did, however, by many painful efforts, conquer her disposition to rebel, and death at length released her from a tyrant, and her heart bounded with the anticipations of the future, which *widowhood* held out to reward the past. Lord Randolph, how-

ever, it should seem, preserved the "ruling passion strong in death," and carried to the grave all his jealous propensities. His last will, whilst it gave *his widow* riches, consequence, and power, in the domains of his ancestors, greatly reduced these advantages if she entered into the gay world, and drew them into a still narrower circle if she married again. She found herself mistress of a splendid income, a magnificent retinue, and an abode of regal elegance, so long as she continued *solely* to reside at Randolph Castle; but her fortune was much lessened if she changed her place and plans of living; and if she ever married again, her jointure alone, as countess of Randolph, remained her own. In such a case, she forfeited even the jewels, equipages, and every thing that had ever appertained to her lord's family. The young earl was left considerably to her management, with an ample allowance for his particular expences, till he was twelve years of age, *provided always* that she continued a widow. He was to reside, during that

time, with her and a private tutor, *wholly* at the castle; at the end of that time he was to go to Eton, and his mother was then allowed to pass three months every year in London.

Many more restrictions, equally vexations and absurd, left Harriet only the shadow of that liberty she had so long and so devoutly prayed for. She had gained, she fancied, by the sacrifice of her best days, the means of uncontrolled enjoyment during the rest of her life, and great indeed was her disappointment at the *denouement*. A second marriage had never entered into her calculation as a means of increasing her happiness, and the restrictions on that point were therefore disregarded, unless as a proof of tyrannical authority carried beyond the grave, which disgusted, rather than vexed her; but she had expected a noble fortune, with the power of enjoying it where and in what manner she pleased; instead of which, she found herself imprisoned in a dull and stately solitude, deprived of society, and nearly as much

Tethered as when her lord was living. To live in the world, she must sacrifice all which, in her proud and ambitious mind, gave that world its charms, since to go forth only as the *poor* widow of lord Randolph, without all the dashing appendages she had so long dreamed of, was impossible. She felt she had rather vegetate at Randolph Castle, its absolute and imperious mistress, than live in a world where she would be unable to do justice to her rank. She had made herself few friends, and the motives which had induced her to marry the earl being generally well known, her disappointment of the expected reward was a source of mirth to many who had envied and hated her. She had never cultivated the society of the neighbourhood with any idea of making a friend, but merely from ostentation, and a love of superior parade. Thus the great laughed at and despised her, and the little folks feared and shunned her. Her temper, never amiable, became still more sour and gloomy, and the pleasant dreams of even *youthful wi-*

dowhood vanished in the dreary reality. Yet she deserved all she met with. She had married from the worst and most selfish motives—a view merely to future aggrandizement, which was to be attained only by the death of him she solemnly swore to love. Her son was more an object of pride than love, and treated by her with more severity than kindness.

At the time our history closes, she had been a widow some few months, and lived in gloomy state, continually irritated with herself and all around her—execrating the memory of her husband—and convinced, though she would not acknowledge it, that even a title, riches, splendour, and consequence, are inadequate to secure happiness, or even comfort, without a heart properly disposed to enjoy them.

Of Mrs. Arlingham little can be said, but that her years dragged heavily on in the same routine of quarrels, recriminations, and mutual jealousies. She married with much fairer prospects than most girls, for Arlingham was a man of good fortune

and good character. But she insisted upon having every thing, or not being satisfied with any thing, and indulged vague ideas of managing her husband, without knowing any better means of accomplishing so great a purpose than a continual indulgence of *proper spirit*. She found him a weak-minded man, and she set him down as a fool whom she ought to govern, and who was therefore easily to be brought into a proper train of management, not knowing that of all beings a weak man with a bad temper is the most obstinate and intractable.

Of Mr. Germaine she saw little more after Arlingham's positive injunctions to him not again to appear at Westhaven. She once met him accidentally at a gentleman's house in Cheshire, but his manners towards her were so impertinent, and so sneeringly indifferent, that she never voluntarily saw him again. She had sense enough to be aware that she had been in danger, and prudence enough never to enter again into any *Platonic* flirtations. Ar-

lingham's jealousy was therefore ill-founded on all future occasions, but the passion was never entirely eradicated. His own affair with Miss Kitty Summers continued for some time, but Mrs. Arlingham, despising both, troubled herself very little about it. She lived more at Randolph Castle than at home, but passed her time generally in going from place to place, unsettled, and weary of herself and every body else.

Arlingham, finding himself more at ease without her, advanced her the money necessary for this kind of life, and pursued his farming occupations undisturbed.

Mr. and Mrs. George Vernon were too commonplace; too heartless and insipid, to be either happy or otherwise. They continued to live in uniform tranquillity at Adderley—had a little, fair, silly-looking baby every year, for whom they thought it necessary to accumulate still more wealth, by living in a very common style themselves. It might be said of them, in the words of the old song—

“ They eat, and drank, and slept, and then—
They eat, and drank, and slept again.”

Mrs. Pringle was near enough to be a great deal with her daughter, and reckoned her, as she reckoned herself, the happiest woman on earth; “ for,” said Mrs. Pringle, “ she has nothing to do—she eats and drinks of the best—she wears what she likes of the most expensive things—she goes out when she likes—buys what she pleases, and never does nothing but play at chess with her children’s governess all day long.”

After all, happiness must vastly depend on idea.

Not such was the life of our favourite Althea. At the period when we are about to take leave of her, she is the mother of three children, between whom, and the orphans of her less-fortunate sister, no difference of affection or attention can be traced, either in her own conduct or that of her admirable husband. Firm where she feels herself right—yielding where she thinks

herself in an error—placid, cheerful, active, and affectionate, she is the best of wives and mothers, the most endearing of friends. The little asperities which formerly marked the temper of Vavasour, and which all his own excellent sense had been insufficient to conquer, yielded to the sweet influence of her ever-placid manner. Unbounded confidence, without which happiness must ever be unknown in married life, subsisted between these amiable people. The thoughts of each were open to the other. The little foibles of each were tenderly spared and borne with, and thus disputes were unknown.

It was a fortunate circumstance for the children of Isabella that they were so early thrown upon the care of such preceptors, for very differently would their irritable and obstinate tempers have been treated by their parents. As to the children of Althea and Vavasour, they inherited goodness—they were born in the midst of its fairest examples, and it was enforced by all they heard and saw, from the moment

when they were capable of hearing reason. Mrs. Vernon, though she sometimes thought Althea too rigid, was forced to own she saw no children so amiable, so happy in themselves, or so agreeable to others, as the little group at Charleville: whilst in their education—in unremitting sweetness and attention to her husband and his interest—in duty and affectionate gratitude to her mother and her immediate friends—and in universal philanthropy and acts of benevolence, Althea found almost perfect happiness. From the general evils of mortality, sickness, and occasional anxiety, neither sir Montague nor his wife were exempt; but these evils were lightened by participation and mutual kindness. Self-inflicted sorrows they knew not, and their union exemplified the triumph of common sense and rational feeling over the more brilliant and dazzling blaze of romance.

“At length then, my dear Althea,” said Mrs. Charlton, “you are convinced that happiness may be found in matrimony?”

“ Yes,” replied Althea, “ I am convinced that I have found it, and possibly in a superior degree to any I might have experienced as a single woman; but then I reckon at the same time that I am blest in a very extraordinary manner. I never was so bigoted to an opinion as to suppose happiness was incompatible with marriage; but I think now, as I have always thought, that, generally speaking, a single life is the happiest. I am indeed singularly fortunate, for I have never yet beheld the man with whom I could have been happy, except Vavasour. It is not therefore the *state* itself to which I give the pre-eminence, but to the virtues and amiable qualities of my husband in particular, which must make any woman happy who is disposed to be so.”

“ You are too modest to enumerate your own good qualities with your husband’s” said Mrs. Charlton, “ but you must feel convinced, from observation and experience, that unless they are mutual, happiness is still unattainable. The fact is this

—you substituted reason for romance, and were content to see things as they were, and not to expect perfection in any thing. Prudence is such a cold, contemptible word in the vocabulary of most modern ladies and gentlemen, that they despise those who make use of it, contented to look forward to adopting it when age shall have made it more in character. Instances are endless, even in my own range of observation, of couples being wretched through life from a want of this cold quality, which they despise till they smart from the consequences of such contempt. An involved income and an increasing family—the interference of relations—thwarting tempers—the want of confidence and domestic management—*proper spirit*—gallantries on one side, and unavoidable jealousy on the other—quarrels about money—coldness and neglect—and disappointed views altogether:—these are the rocks on which matrimonial happiness is almost sure to split, either singly or *en masse*, for I have known them all unite. Even in the hap-

piest unions, therefore, there is much danger, and it is difficult to steer a clear and steady course. In our despised sisterhood there are also many 'pains and penalties,' for human nature cannot admit of unmixed felicity; but I still think we are, upon the whole, the happier class. Unfortunately, young people never were, and never will be, content to take this assertion upon trust, and the experiment which generally convinces them of its truth is a very hazardous one. If we are rich, we have opportunities, unchecked, of doing good; if we are poor, we yet have our limited portion at our own command, and dispose of it as we please. If we are not pleased by being courted by lovers, we are not mortified by being neglected by husbands, for women perhaps every way inferior, and only preferred because they *are not wives*. If we are tired of our situation, we are free to change. An old maid, if she be poor, may be independent; and if she loses some occasional happiness, certainly escapes much continual trouble. Notwithstand-

ing the delightful instance of wedded felicity I see at Charleville, *I* still incline to give the 'Balance of Comfort' to celibacy, and must continue to do so, till reason is more generally substituted for passion, and temper made of more importance in the solemn compact than dash and spirit."

Notwithstanding Mrs. Charlton's decision, we apprehend that *young people, from fifteen to fifty*, will still generally incline to the side of matrimony, particularly as, with *generous impartiality*, we have given one instance of its being capable of superior felicity. That instance, it is true, is founded on superior excellence; but who will doubt that they themselves possess the same attributes? This *admirable work* will therefore probably not prevent one pair from approaching the sacred altar of Hymen, for all will believe themselves and their beloved exempted from the failings of human nature, and that an exception will be made in their favour to general consequences.

Would we could flatter ourselves that

the foregoing pages might induce a prudent degree of hesitation and forethought—that tempers and characters might be weighed with unimpassioned accuracy—that the means of pecuniary comforts might be secured—and that love might be founded on the more durable basis of esteem. The flimsy materials of passion, however ardent, must be evanescent. If lovers of both sexes could be induced to add esteem, prudence, deliberation, and attention to character and temper, we might then, and not till then, hope to see a different inclination of the “Balance of Comfort.”

THE END.

